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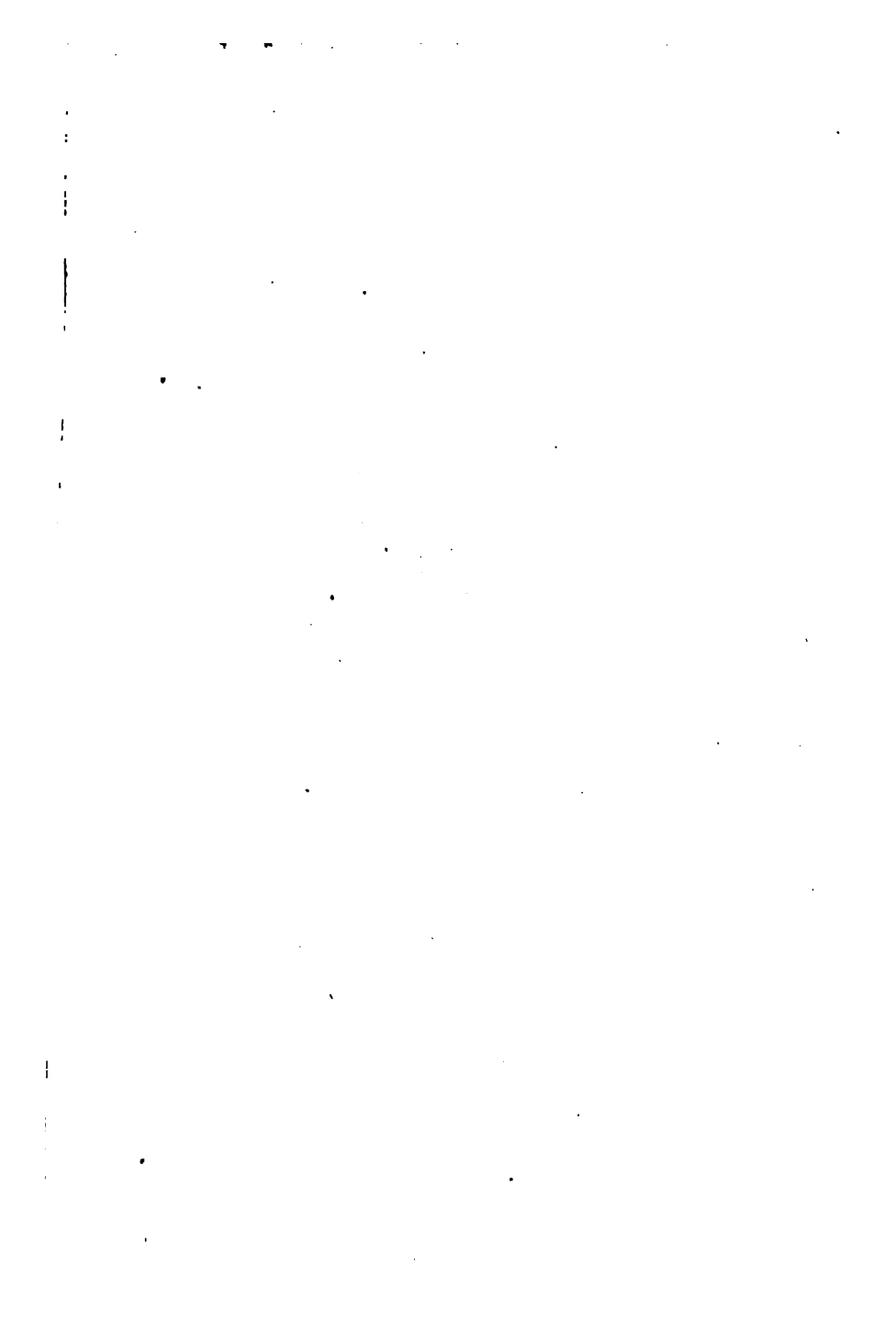
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IN A WORLD
OF
HIS OWN.

BY
MRS. FRED. E. PIRKIS,

AUTHOR OF
"DISAPPEARED FROM HER HOME."

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IN A WORLD OF HIS OWN.

BOOK II.—CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XIV.

GENERAL DOUAY had been surprised and defeated at Weissenburg, and had fallen in the very thick of the fight.

The battle of Wörth had been fought, and the fate of France trembled in the balance when Llewellyn and Elliott, pushing forward with all eagerness, reached the frontier.

A brief interview with the Minister of War, in Paris, had ended most satisfactorily, and Llewellyn, still completely in the dark as to his friend's antecedents, could not but remark the respect and consideration with which he was treated on all sides. Perhaps the frequent allusions which were made to Sadowa and Magenta, in a measure accounted for this; and Llewellyn noticed more than one old veteran with scarred, bronzed face, come forward eagerly to salute the stalwart Englishman.

The tidings of the French defeats had startled the capital like a clap of thunder. Only the day before the news of the disasters of Wörth reached Paris the inhabitants had been rejoicing in a false report of a splendid victory. Weissenburg, it was stated, had been retaken; thousands of prisoners had been made, and sixty guns captured.

So the Parisians put on holiday attire, lighted up their houses, and sang the "Marseillaise" about the streets to their hearts' content.

Then came the solemn news of loss and disorder and retreat, and the Emperor's appeal to the patriotism of France.

The people, intoxicated with a fancied triumph, found it difficult to realise the humiliating truth. But Llewellyn and Elliott, as they journeyed rapidly forward, found it only too surely verified.

Troops of peasants, carrying as best they might, their poor baggage, and driving their herds before them, crowded the road, bringing wonderful tales of the enemy's progress. How that the forests behind Saarbruck were literally alive with Prussian troops, and how that St. Avold, fifteen miles from Metz, was reported to be in their hands. Mixed with

these rumours came dark whispers of demoralization among the French soldiers and a mismanaged commissariat, of a General on the field of battle compelled to cease firing for want of ammunition, of poor fellows marching and fighting with bare feet, and of horses ill-supplied, even with half allowances of corn.

Elliott looked gloomy enough over all this.

“We shall be on the losing side this time, March,” he said, as they pressed forward side by side, on the last stage of their journey. “The devil will have a fine innings in this campaign. Talk about the balance of power! He holds the scales pretty much in his own hands just now, I’m thinking, thanks to those white-washed scoundrels of Prussians, with their Bible-reading King and psalm-singing Generals.”

On the 12th of August they joined Marshal Bazaine at Metz. The Emperor had at this time retired to the camp at Chalons, leaving the chief command in the Marshal's hands, and Elliott presenting himself to his old friends and *compagnons de guerre*, was at once given the command of a troop in General L'Admirault's corps, Llewellyn falling in as a trooper.

"I am not fit for a higher post," he replied, in answer to Elliott's remonstrances. "I am nothing better than a raw recruit, and it remains to be proved how I shall behave under fire. You see, I have not the patriotism of these poor fellows to bear me up, nor your experience and war-training, which gives a man a cool head and steady nerves, even in the thickest of the fight."

This was on the eve of Courcelles. The

order had not yet been given out for the marching of the three army corps remaining on the east of Metz, and old veterans and war-worn generals had throughout the day been discussing in low whispers the apparent dilatoriness of the Marshal's movements.

"It strikes me, March," Elliott said in reply, as they strolled along between the lines of rifle pits which marked the entrenchments, "that cool heads and steady nerves are rather wanting among us at the present moment. Our commanders appear to be (as far as I can judge) in a pleasant sort of haze as to the movements and exact position of the enemy. That confounded cavalry of theirs, for ever flying and buzzing in all directions, forms a splendid shield to their real position and tactics. I only hope we shan't be caught

in a trap here, and driven back to that cursed corner"—he pointed to the dark walls of the fortress, bathed in the lustre of the August moon—that same moon which lighted Anna to her mother's death-bed in the Workhouse Infirmary at Chelsea.

"Ah," said Llewellyn, "you know more about these things than I do. I am too much in a haze myself to discover whether or no others are in the same plight. I don't suppose if I had begun at it ever so early I should have taken kindly to fighting, either as a science or trade. You see one must go heart and soul into a thing if he wishes to make anything of it, and—"

"And," interrupts Elliott, almost scornfully, "from what I have seen of you I should say you would have extreme difficulty in throwing yourself heart and soul into any

one thing, or devoting all your energies and sympathies to any one cause to the exclusion of another. You are one of those fortunate individuals who have a knack of seeing all round a subject, as it were, and consequently find no side to adopt. Not content with seeing with your own eyes and hearing with your own ears, you must step into other people's shoes and see with their eyes and hear with their ears; and after having looked at your subject from a dozen or more points of view, end by bestowing your sympathies all round equally; discovering 'extenuating circumstances' *ad infinitum*, for the unrighteous, and flaws and cracks in the most perfect diamond. Such men as you always fail in life, never make a name or fame for themselves, unless, indeed, they are governed

and led by a hidden spring, which I fear has no place in your mechanism."

"And that hidden spring is—"

"Self-interest," replied Elliott, with his short, unpleasant laugh. "Let the poet talk, if he will, about love or patriotism or any other ism ruling, 'the Court, the camp, the grove,' common sense and experience quickly discover self-interest, under varied names and disguises, to be the real monarch, and very soon send in their allegiance. What do you suppose has brought all these French and German fellows face to face here to hack and mutilate each other? Wounded honour, patriotism, the defence of right? Pshaw, common sense whispers, a little slice off each other's territory, a little gain in prestige and glory, and *the Dictatorship of Europe*. Bah!

I'm sick of the whole matter. None but the very youngest, the most ignorant or the most fortunate of mankind would attempt to move the world with any other lever, or bend men to their will by any other instrument than this all-mighty, all-powerful force."

"You mistake, Elliott," said Llewellyn quietly. "I am not the very youngest nor the most ignorant or fortunate of mankind ; yet I do not admit the truth of your argument for one moment. You are looking at things too much upon the surface when you attempt to give in one word the secret of a man's success or failure in life. Success ! Failure ! These are not such easily-understood terms as we in our worldliness and blindness are apt to imagine. If by a successful life you will understand a life which fulfils to the uttermost the purpose for which

it was given, and a failure in life the life which fails of attaining this end, then we stand on the same ground, and I am quite willing to contest the matter with you. But if by success and failure you mean the position, the wealth, the honour in this world which a man gains or fails to gain for himself, then I simply give it up, for the point is not worth arguing."

Elliott threw at him a glance full of sarcasm and penetration, then his mouth took a softer curve, and he said in an altered tone—

"March, if I had known you earlier in life, I think I should have been a better man; however, now," and he shrugged his shoulders, "after my long years of service to the devil, I shan't attempt to look out for a new master; perhaps the fate which brought us together so unexpectedly will loosen our hands in this

campaign of ours, so that I pull you not down-hill with me. Look at that poor wretch there," he exclaimed with a sudden dash at a new subject, to avoid possibly a show of feeling for which he would hold himself in contempt, "look at that poor befooled boy, writing most likely some sentimental farewell to a sweetheart, who has given herself up by this time to some other man."

He pointed to a young man of twenty or so, who, leaning with his elbow on the ground, had converted his knapsack into a desk, and, by the shifting light of the moon, was writing some half-dozen lines on a torn sheet of paper.

"Idiot!" Elliott went on, "he thinks if he falls among some hundreds of his fellows, some one will take the trouble to search his pockets, and send his love-letter to his far-

away darling! and she will treasure up his last lines, and live and die with them on her heart! Poor fool! March, if you ever want a woman to be true to you, take my advice, and get hold of some other man's wife, she will stick to you then through everything, because her very truth to you, gratifies her innate passion for falseness to the one to whom her truth is due, but believe in a girl's first love, and faith, and purity, bah!—believe in Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Methodism, Spiritualism sooner than build your faith on such shifting sands as these!”

Llewellyn made no reply. The thought passed through his mind—

“How much this man has loved, how bitterly suffered, for his grand strong nature to be so warped and marred!”

Elliott went on.

“ Don’t let yourself pity me, March (I can see it in your face), I would sooner be the man I am now, hardened, callous, dyed in sin if you will, than the poor befooled trusting idiot, with his belief in man’s truth, and woman’s constancy, that I was some twenty years since. I don’t know why I talk to you in this way, I who have never babbled of myself and my misfortunes to any living soul. Come what will, they can never say I have dragged my father’s name through the mire.” Elliott spoke excitedly, and quickened his pace to a long hurried stride. “ Sometimes,” he added, “ when these thoughts press upon me, and goad me almost to madness, I feel I shall yet add one crowning sin to my black miserable soul—that of murder ! ”

Llewellyn linked his arm in that of his friend’s.

“That is,” he said, “because you keep all these thoughts and memories locked up in your brain, and they burn and scorch there till the pain is beyond endurance. See here, Elliott, I owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, far more than I can ever hope to repay, for your kindness to me in my time of need; it would be such an immense pleasure to me if I could be of any service to you. I don’t profess to be much of a philosopher myself, for I have already made some miserable blunders in my short life, but it may be just possible I might see in your history, if I knew it, something to turn your anger to pity, for those who have wronged you, something to make you thank God that you are the sinned against, rather than the sinner.”

“Then,” retorted Elliott, his old laugh and manner returning to him, “you may be

quite sure I shall not take you into my confidence. I have no wish to return aught but evil for evil, to those who have wronged me. If God made man (which I sometimes doubt) he planted in his nature so deeply the *lex talionis* and the love of it, that the nature must be warped and crushed before it can learn to heap coals of fire, as the parsons say, on their enemy's head.

“Listen to me, March, I have heard your story from beginning to end, at least so far as you have been good enough to tell it to me. Badly as you have been served, bitterly as you have suffered, you have still your name of which to be proud, and whose honour you can defend from all stain, while I—ah, well, you have asked for the story, you shall have it, and judge for yourself of the bitterness of the curse which fell upon me.

“I, like yourself, was brought up amidst wealth and luxury. Like yourself I had some of the closest and sweetest home ties. My father was in a higher rank of life than your uncle, for he was an English peer, and I as his eldest son was pampered and indulged to my heart's content.

“There were only two of us, myself and a fair-haired blue-eyed boy (like your own little Archie) whom I sheltered and cherished, as only an elder brother can, one too weak or indolent to take care of himself. From his earliest infancy, his health had been feeble, and I suppose for this reason my mother had always shown more tenderness to him than to me, a strong hearty boy some four or five years older. I acquiesced perfectly in this. I had not the least envy of the puny little lad, and as we grew to manhood together, I may

say his health, his happiness, his comfort were my one thought and care.

“When I was about twenty-five years of age, my father died, and I came into possession of his title and estates. Shortly after this I fell deeply in love with a young lady, the daughter of one of my father’s oldest friends, a great beauty (one of those pink and white angels you admire so much, March) and one whose temper and disposition were reported to be of the sweetest. I made her an offer of myself and fortune, and need scarcely say was accepted instantly, for I was considered a desirable match in those days.

“After my engagement was made known, a change of some sort fell upon our home. I noticed that my mother, now become an invalid, seldom sent for me to her room; my brother, too, evidently shunned me, and more

than once I detected a frown and scowl on his face, as he furtively watched me. At length the crash came ; one morning my mother sent for me, she had something special to communicate, so she said. Without a thought or suspicion, I went to her and was received with an amount of affection and tenderness I was totally unaccustomed to meet with at her hands. After some desultory talk, her real object in thus sending for me became apparent.

“ ‘ Had I noticed how ill my brother was ? Did I not see he was sinking into a deep decline, was really in fact dying of grief and disappointed love ! ’

“ ‘ Love,’ I echoed, ‘ and for whom ! ’ Then my mother whispered the name of my promised wife, and with tears and entreaties, begged I would now, as ever, yield place to

her darling son, would at least stand back and give him a chance to win the heart of the girl he loved so passionately.

“‘It is already won,’ I exclaimed in my blind folly and simplicity. ‘Anything in reason I would give up to the poor little fellow, but this I am bound in honour to keep and guard even with life.’

“Then my mother turned her face away from me, and told me in hard cold tones, I must be prepared to take the consequences of my selfish obstinacy!

“Utterly bewildered, I left her and went to seek my brother to reason the matter out with him.

“However, he was nowhere to be seen, and his servant told me he had started that morning for London. In reality, I found out afterwards, he had gone to my blue-eyed

darling to plead his own cause with her, or rather offer his own price for her.

“The rest is soon told. My brother’s next communication to me took the form of a lawyer’s letter. ‘Was I aware,’ so the lawyer enquired, ‘that there was a flaw in my title to my father’s estates; in fact that I held them only by sufferance on the part of my brother. That I was in fact my father’s natural son, that he and my mother (who had been a celebrated actress in her young days) had been married privately after my birth, and the date of the marriage could, without the slightest difficulty, be proved.’ The writer hoped, for family reasons, I would yield place quietly to the rightful heir, and not compel them to drag the whole affair before a court of law. In conclusion, he informed me he was prepared to make me a

most liberal offer, on the part of my brother, viz., £1,000 a year for life, provided I instantly left the country, never to return.

“I went straight to my mother, and laid the letter before her; she put it on one side. ‘I know what it contains,’ she said. ‘Your brother is acting by my advice, and if you are wise, you will accept his offer.’

“I did not rave at her, March, nor curse her to her face, for she was a woman, and I believed in women then. I asked her one question—why she had, with her love for her younger son, kept all this a secret for so many years. ‘I promised your father on his death-bed,’ she said, ‘never to divulge the truth, nor should I have done so now had you shown a common humanity towards your weakly suffering brother.’

“At first I felt bewildered, crushed almost,

with the iniquity and injustice of the whole thing. Then the strength and savageness of my nature came to my rescue, and I determined to expose to the world the whole infamous intrigue, as I termed it, to blast my name, and win my promised wife from my side. What, indeed, could mother or brother be to me if they could thus turn round on one who, whether lawfully or unlawfully, was yet their own flesh and blood. What, indeed, were a father's love worth if he could thus leave his eldest son defenceless to meet such an attack as this.

“I wrote urgently to our family lawyers, giving them full instructions to fight the whole matter out with my unnatural relations, drag it, if need were, from one court of law to another, as long as a farthing of my father's money remained. Then, when this

was written, I went straight away to my 'pink and white angel' to lay the facts of the case before her, and to ask for her sympathy, and yet another assurance of her love and truth.

"But no, I won't weary you with these details, March. The syren flattered, charmed, sung over me as usual, and in less than six months from that day was married to my brother. The story proved to be a true one; my own lawyers refused to take up my cause in the face of the simple but overwhelming evidence my mother brought forward, and I, the eldest son, the flattered, courted, caressed favourite of fortune, left my father's house with only a few sovereigns in my purse, without a name even, without a relative or friend to care whether I gained a beggar's pittance, or starved like a hound in a ditch,

and without a hope for this world or the next.

“No! I won’t go into heroics, and tell you how I conducted myself under my misfortunes. You know me by this time, and can imagine how I cursed them with a will, and consigned them all to the lowest limbo of the lowest hell. Well! what does it matter; they are none the worse for my maledictions! My mother died in the odour of sanctity, leaving a goodly sum for the building of almshouses for the aged poor, and my brother—he and his beautiful wife are among the leaders of society, favourites at Court, honoured, respected, flattered, wherever they shed the light of their countenances. You, yourself, March, have no doubt clasped hands with them in friendship ere this; may do so again if fortune favour you!

“There, you know my history now. Singularly like your own in some respects, singularly unlike in others. It is the old story, I suppose, of the scorching sun shining upon the lump of clay and the lump of wax, hardening one, and melting the other. You, no doubt, have lost in your conflict a little of the strength, and bone, and muscle you once possessed, and I—well, I am John Elliott at your service, sir,” he saluted Llewellyn with a low, mocking bow, “with more sins on my conscience than my conscience can remember; with a terrible contempt for the whole of mankind in general, and myself in particular, and with one strong, passionate hope in my heart that somewhere, somehow I shall find out those who have made my life a torment and burden to me—the false mother, the false love, the false brother—and consign them,

with a thrice knotted cord, to the place they so richly deserve ! ”

“ Why trouble yourself, Elliott,” said Llewellyn, sadly. “ They will find it for themselves ; if not in this life, in some other, they will surely go to their own place—just as surely as you or I ! ”





CHAPTER XV.

COURCELLES! Vionville! Their names are written in letters of blood and fire in the history of France, and throughout this century, at least, will sound in the Frenchman's ears like the tolling of a funeral bell.

To Llewellyn, those four days of blood and carnage passed like some hideous nightmare. When first the rush and roar of the battle sounded in his ears, and he saw his comrades and officers mown down on every side of him by the well-served Prussian artillery, he

could have thrown up his arms in anguish, and called upon God in Heaven to step down from His throne, and stop the ruthless slaughter. Then, swept along with the tide, he went mad, like his fellows, and like them, dealt out death and torture with free, unsparing hand to the foe in front.

Out of these two battles he came forth unscathed, and received high commendation from his General for gallant deeds done in the thick of the fight.

“Gallant deeds,” echoed Llewellyn. “Could they have read my heart they would have seen how gladly I would have laid down my life for any one of those poor fellows, sooner than have harmed one hair of their heads.”

But it was too late to go back now; another great battle was at hand. Bazaine

had lost his last and only chance of cutting his way through the armies gradually hemming him in on every side, and falling back upon Gravelotte, he made vast preparations of defence against the attack which he knew was impending.

And then the terrible day of Gravelotte dawned.

With one earnest prayer in his heart, Llewellyn entered that awful field of slaughter.

“Great God that I may be one of the first to fall ere the shedding of a fellow creature’s blood shall again stain my hands!”

And his prayer was granted.

When Elliott, with his Horse Chasseurs, came tearing up the brow of the height overlooking the deep ravine which separated the combatants, and breaking into a wild

hurrah, dashed forward to meet the advancing column of the enemy, one of the upward-pointed Prussian guns made an ugly gap in their very centre, and, in one terrible *mélée*, horses and riders fell dead and dying.

“*En avant, en avant ! Pour la France !*” shouted Elliott, urging his men forward, and on into the very thickest of the fight they went. No time to think of fallen comrades ; Frenchmen must dare, and do to-day as they have never done before, if they will save themselves from that horrible incarceration at Metz which they know must be the inevitable result of their failure.

Desperately, valiantly, with fire in their blood, and the war-madness in their brain, they fight against the unwavering, ceaseless and steadily advancing line of the enemy. With the courage of despair, they out-do the

bravest of each other's deeds, and every man prepares himself to stand against two of his foes.

The noon fades into evening, and still the blood-shedding and slaughter goes on; the evening deepens into night, and then the Frenchmen, gathering together their nearly-exhausted strength, make one more mighty attack on their unfaltering enemy; one more fearful volley of their artillery crashes and thunders from height to height and along the length of the dark ravine, and then all is still. The Frenchmen retire disordered from the field. The Prussians hold the heights beyond the woods, and the battle of Gravelotte has been lost and won.

With hands and face blackened and blood-stained, with the growling and whirring of the mitrailleuse still in his ears, Elliott and

a small band of grave, down-cast soldiers find their way among the dead and dying horses and men which lie so thickly strewn upon the brow of that hill they had mounted so gallantly in the morning. The stars shine out but faintly through the heavy clouds of smoke which still overhang the field. Burning houses at either end cast a lurid glare over the grey, stony faces now settling down into the anguish of death, and ever and anon some low moan or sharp cry of pain told the bitter tale of wounds and suffering.

“It was somewhere here he fell, in our first charge,” said Elliott, “when the enemy opened fire.”

He lowered his lantern as he spoke, the light flickering on to a white, upturned face at his feet—that of the poor lad whose foolish love-letter had so provoked his ridicule. The

wheel of a gun-carriage had passed over his shoulder as he lay; the ground on either side of him appeared literally ploughed up with shot and shell, and dark purple stains upon the grass showed how terrible the blood-shedding had been on that hill-side. The soft south wind for an instant lifted the pall of sulphurous smoke, and the light of the burning villages fell dimly upon a fair, golden curled head, with dented, broken helmet, which lay, face downwards, on the grass. His arms were extended high above his head, his dead horse, in its last agony, had rolled over his body, and the hands of an old scarred veteran clutched at his shoulder.

“Raise him up gently, lads,” said Elliott. “Here, give him into my arms, and you go on ahead with your party.”

A chasseur came forward.

“There is a farm-house near here,” he said, “on the road to St. Hubert; shall we take him there?”

Elliott, lifting Llewellyn, tenderly as a mother would a dying child, signals to the chasseur to lead the way, and they march slowly forth from the ghastly scene with their silent burden between them.

A small farm-house, sheltered by a few poplars, lies a little off the St. Hubert road. Elliott swings back the partly-shattered gate, and, entering the deserted homestead, deposits Llewellyn on his own cloak on the floor, for there is neither bed nor mattress to be seen.

An old woman, with a half-stupefied, half-terrified face, sits rocking herself in a corner.

“*Grand Dieu,*” she moans, “*Seule sur la terre!*” A young woman, with a lovely boy

some two or three years old clinging round her neck, comes forward. She also has a dazed, bewildered look on her face, as though stunned by some heavy blow. Elliott points to Llewellyn.

"Do what you can for him," he says, "he still breathes, and I will bring a doctor round as quickly as possible."

He props Llewellyn's head on an old footstool lying at hand, the chasseur spreads his own coat over him, and pours some brandy down his throat. Llewellyn opens his eyes, and a faint moan of pain escapes from his lips.

"*C'est là la gloire,*" said the young woman bitterly.

"Well, March," said Elliott, for not even in the presence of death could he have forgotten to sound his song of triumph over the

disorder and disorganisation that stalked abroad on the earth, "what do you think now of your perfect God and His perfect laws?"

Llewellyn struggles to speak.

"It is all part of the great plan," he falters. "It all fits in somewhere—I cannot explain—everything is just as it should be—anything else would be wrong!" Then his eyes close to the sights and sounds around him.





BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

“**P**IERCED with a bullet--buried like a dog in a trench!” The words rang in Lady Victoria Cathrow’s ears as she laid her weary head on her pillow on the night of her interview with Anna and Max, and woke with her in the morning to torture her anew.

What did that girl mean by speaking to her thus? Certainly she was very underbred, and must, she was sure, be far from

sweet-tempered. Evidently, too, she was in love with Llewellyn March, and what presumption that was! Then the thought flashed through her mind how completely Llewellyn's and Anna's positions had been reversed; how, in point of fact, the presumption would have been on Llewellyn's side had he made his cousin the offer of his hand. His cousin, too! And her tiny foot beat impatiently on the floor while her maid brushed and plaited her masses of gold hair, for beneath her sweet repose of manner and gentle ways, there ran a strong undercurrent of self-will and temper, which, properly governed and channelled, might have developed into that firmness, self-reliance and decision which her character so unfortunately lacked.

For all her education and training had been upon the surface.

Lady Mary had, no doubt, done the best for her niece she possibly could, but she herself had had no conception of that higher form of education which develops from within outwards, and which creates and fosters those nobler faculties of heart and soul, without which all mere accomplishments and refinements are but as plaster or stucco-work upon a badly built house.

And could any one have searched for Victoria's soul at this time with a microscope, they would have found it a very small speck indeed ; smaller, perhaps, than that of the magnificent Talbôt hound which lay for ever as a footstool at her feet, and accompanied her in her daily rides and drives.

The highest and best part of her nature was the love she undoubtedly bore towards her first lover, but it is possible that had

that lover been introduced to her as a poor or undesirably connected suitor, he would scarcely have had a second glance from her beautiful eyes, certainly not a second thought from her well-tutored heart.

He had, however, been presented to her, clothed in every attraction which wealth, talent, and beauty can bestow upon a man, her love had been caught as it were under a pretence, and she found it extremely difficult to extricate herself from the silken mesh without the loss of some of her brilliant plumage.

"I shall forget it all in time," she said to herself, "live it down as the preachers say." And the little foot tapped more and more rapidly on the floor, and the Talbot hound looked up wonderingly at this unusual exhibition of energy on the part of his mistress.

Sidonie, her maid, came forward with a message.

"A lady wishes to see mademoiselle ; she will not leave a name, or card, but must, she says, see mademoiselle herself."

A lady ! and Victoria's pale face flushes scarlet. Who would come in this way before ten o'clock in the morning, and insist on an interview with this under-bred persistence, save Anna Colet ? The scene of last night passes rapidly before her mind. No ! she will not risk another encounter with that fiery-tempered girl in which she would undoubtedly have to suffer a second defeat.

"Tell the lady," she replies, "I am engaged, I cannot possibly see her."

Anna, standing in the hall of Lady Mary's house in Mayfair—she will not enter farther—receives the message calmly.

“I did wrong not to send in my name,” she says to the man, “take the Lady Victoria this,” she tears a leaf from her pocket-book, and writes hurriedly—“Will you take my message of last night to Mr. March?”

“ANNA.”

—then folds it intricately, and hands it to the man.

Victoria reads it word by word, tears it in tiny pieces, and bids her maid say, “there is no answer required;” and “do not bring me another message, I insist,” she adds; then she desires Sidonie to leave her alone, and throwing herself half-dressed on the bed buries her face in the pillows.

She did not weep floods of tears, nor cry out in her pain as she had done the day she wrote to break her troth with her lover, nor

even as she had wept on the previous night after her return from Anna's home. No, the real true better soul, awakened in her by her love for a true-hearted man, would have a hard struggle to keep alive at all, much less would its life be nurtured and cherished. Victoria Cathrow conventional, superficial, fascinating, and faltering, with both hands stretched out to claim alike this world's goods and the next, would fight hard for existence still, and crush down with might and main the better, truer soul, just kindled into feeble life.

“No power in heaven or earth should keep me from the side of the man I love,” sang the better soul in her ears. “What right has that girl to pursue and persecute me in this way?” said the conventional soul in reply; “does she expect me to have as little regard

for propriety as she has herself, she who has been brought up in a lower class of life, and has no doubt the ideas of her class and order. Does she expect me to start alone in pursuit of the man, throw myself into his arms, and beg him to take me back, and marry me? I went far enough last night in seeking them out for news of him; who is there placed as I am would have dared do this?"

And Victoria paused for a moment to admire herself, and her own heroism in having taken advantage of a lonely evening—when Lady Mary, suffering from head-ache, had retired early to her room—to slip away with her maid to Max Trego's for news of the man who had asked and won from her all the love she had had to bestow.

"Let her take her own messages," her

thoughts went on, "perhaps he will accept her money and herself also."

"Ah, no, no," said the better soul within, rising up and asserting itself, "the Llewellyn March I gave my promises to, could not accept such an offering at any woman's hands; whoever else may falter and fall, he will be true and unchanging—who am I that I should take such a life as his in my hands only to blight and crush it?"

So she lay with her face buried in the pillows. Oh, to break the bonds which bound her! And she clasped her tiny wrist as though the actual iron grip were there. Oh, to be a beggar girl, a tramp, a gipsy, anything so she might get out of this stifling scented atmosphere, breathe the free air of heaven, and own to having a heart and soul of her own.

Presently her maid came up with a message.

"Lady Mary was waiting for her; did she remember the carriage was ordered for twelve, there were dresses and bonnets still to be bought?"

"I have a head-ache," said Victoria, piteously; "I cannot go out to-day!"

Then Lady Mary came up herself to Victoria's room.

"Are you ill, Victoria?" she said, looking at her closely with those searching grey eyes of hers. "I think a drive will do you good. Do you expect me to choose your hats and bonnets for you? or how do you think your *trousseau* can be ready in ten days' time, if you will not take the slightest trouble about it?"

Ah, that *trousseau*! That had been the

real reason of their coming to London at that unorthodox period of the year.

Victoria sat up on the bed and pushed her hair from her temples. "I think," she said, looking steadily at the pattern of the chintz curtains, "I shall go out as a governess!"

Lady Mary looked at her keenly.

"Yes," she said, calmly, "you would be well suited for such a position. There is Mrs. Fitzneil, with her seven children, boys and girls, has great difficulty in getting one to please her, you might stand a chance there, perhaps. You would only have to instruct the elder three in Latin, German, French, and Italian, drawing, and music; and the younger four in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and plain sewing, and all of them in dancing, deportment, calisthenics, and the use of the globes. Their respective ward-

robes are also, I believe, committed to the governess's care!" She pauses for breath. "Now, Victoria, that I have talked nonsense enough to please you, had you not better have your hair done, and come out with me to get a little colour in your cheeks. Otherwise instead of looking like a bride on the twenty-eighth you will look like a widow," and without another glance at her niece she left the room.

Victoria rose slowly and rang for her maid. Was there really no escape for her from this hideous *trousseau* business, with the marriage ceremony as its inevitable termination? Her fingers clasped her wrist once more, as though to break her fetters, her poor little wings fluttered and beat against the iron bars of her cage, then in the daintiest of bonnets, and with the sweetest of smiles on her face,

she went forth with her aunt to visit the various temples of taste and fashion in Piccadilly and Bond street.

Oh, the weariness of that morning! No flutterings of a girl's pleasure, as the merits of the bridal veil and travelling dress were discussed and decided upon. Only a dulness, a miserable heart sickness, and a wild longing for freedom, and another and better life to be begun somewhere, and a feeble stretching forth of the hand to grasp it. And ever and anon the impassioned words of Anna would startle her and ring in her ears—

“Fettered or unfettered, I would find my way to his side, and, living or dead, claim him for my own.”

At length the miserable morning ended, and Lady Mary suggested to Victoria the desirability of calling on Miriam Oldfield for

a final attempt to persuade her to become one of the eight bridesmaids who were to be enrolled for the 28th.

“Did you know,” said Lady Mary, as they stopped at the door of the Baronet’s house in Eaton square, “that Miriam’s latest clerical novelty is the Rev. Anthony Everhard, the chaplain at Castle Mount?”

This she said to prepare Victoria somewhat, fearful lest in the state in which her nerves were that morning, she might in some way betray herself.

They found the family seated in the smaller drawing-room, Miriam and the chaplain in earnest converse over the printed reports of the London Mendicity Society, Sir Charles, with flushed face, leaning back in a commodious easy-chair, occasionally breaking in upon their talk with anathemas upon his

cook, his doctor, and his own feeble appetite.

“Excuse a confirmed invalid from rising, Lady Mary,” he says, as the two ladies enter the room. “I have been upset, confoundedly upset this morning. What do you imagine that *chef* of mine sent up just now for my lunch—and that, let me tell you, after I had sent a special message to him that I had no appetite whatever to-day, and required to be tempted, persuaded to eat just to keep myself alive. No! You cannot guess. It is simply incredible—unheard of. What will you say when I tell you that as I sat down to table I smelt veal! Only fancy putting veal before an invalid! The wretch had prepared me a *compote* of veal and chicken! The smell was enough. I came away immediately, and here I am, absolutely

sinking for want of proper nourishment! I, a confirmed invalid, who should be pressed to eat every hour of the day. Ah, we will change all this soon!"

And he held Victoria's hand for a half-minute in his with the nearest approach to a lover-like squeeze of which he was capable.

Only a half minute! And in that half minute Victoria found time to say to herself—

"And it is for this man I have thrown over Llewellyn March, for this state of bondage, for these gilded chains I have given up the better, nobler life which would have opened out before me as wife and companion to a loving, true-hearted man!"

Miriam came forward.

"Why don't you ring and order something you can eat," she said to her father

crossly ; “ or take the diet prescribed by your doctor ? ”

The word doctor was enough.

“ My doctor,” said the Baronet. “ As though I had a doctor ; as though in all London I could find a man who understood my case and the intricacies of my constitution ! ”

It was too much. Victoria turned to the Rev. Anthony, leaving the Baronet to her aunt.

“ We are discussing,” said the chaplain, “ the propriety of establishing a lay sisterhood in this neighbourhood. The mendicity which prevails within a stone’s throw of our doors is something appalling. I regret, however, that Miss Oldfield is opposed to my plan. She considers it would be opening the door to Romish institutions. It is very un-

fortunate, as I quite counted upon her aid in this matter. So I suppose I must hold the idea in suspension for a time (I won't say give it up), and go on with our school of discipline and reformatory work for the present."

Victoria caught at the words. Would this man be one to help her in her necessity. Was there really a means of escape for her opening here?

"Mr. Everhard," she said, "you are always engaged in works of charity and mercy. I wonder it has never occurred to you to open a school of discipline or reformatory for people in a higher class of life. I am sure many would be only too thankful to become its inmates."

Surely he must hear the misery speaking out in her voice, and note the feeble

stretching forth of her hands for help and guidance.

“I don’t quite follow you, Lady Victoria,” replies Everhard. “Do you mean a sort of Protestant convent, where absolute penances and punishments would be insisted on to satisfy a man or woman’s conscience as to sins known only to themselves? I saw the idea started a little while ago. But that, if you like, is treading closely on the edges of Romanism, and I could not possibly sanction such a notion.”

“I don’t think I know what I mean,” said Victoria sadly, turning away to Miriam, who stood at her elbow, Lady Mary meantime being fully occupied in endeavouring to soothe the Baronet’s feelings, or turn the conversation on some more interesting topics than that of *chefs* and doctors.

“You must excuse me,” Miriam was saying, taking up a green-and-violet bonnet from one of the chairs. “My time is so precious, I always keep a bonnet somewhere at hand to slip on. I have no time for running up and down stairs to my dressing-room. I generally breakfast and lunch in this,” and she looked down at her light plaid Ulster, ill-fitting and somewhat weighty for the time of year.

“I fear we are detaining you,” said Victoria. Then she looked up into Miriam’s face.

Would this woman, all-absorbed in Christian deeds, stretch out her hand and help her now? One more feeble effort she would make to escape from the web she felt tightening around her.

She looked across at the Baronet, and again into Miriam’s face.

“When I see Sir Charles,” she said in a low voice, “suffering as he does, and finding no relief, I begin to fear I shall be neither a help nor a comfort to him, and that after all I am utterly unsuited for a married life.”

This was bold indeed. Miriam eyed her sternly.

“Marriage is a delusion and a snare,” she said. “I would that every one were as I am;” and she put on the violet-and-green bonnet, looking sideways in the glass. “But the gift is not accorded unto all,” and she turned up the collar of her Ulster. “And a promise once given cannot be withdrawn,” she concluded, looking over her shoulder at Lady Mary Cathrow, to see if she were preparing to leave.

“Come Victoria,” said the latter, rising. “You must be faint and famishing also.

You forget, we have not yet had time for lunch."

They took their leave, and as they went out at the door Miriam was saying to the chaplain—

"The new Lady Oldfield will have much to endure, otherwise I should have thought the settlements excessive. As it is, however, she will be scarcely paid too heavily for the duties she will have to perform."

And so it came to pass that about ten days afterwards the poor little thing, in a hundred yards of Valenciennes lace and twenty of Brussels, with the usual complement of white satin and orange blossoms, stood before the altar at St. George's, Hanover Square, and amid ringing of bells and scattering of flowers, drove away as Sir Charles Oldfield's wife.

“A May Day pageant at a funeral,” thinks Victoria, bowing her thanks and good-byes to her smiling friends.

Does the clanging of bells and the scatterings of flowers, the jewels, and smiles and congratulations shut out from her mind the thought that she is entering a real school of discipline and reformatory now, where hard lessons and long lessons will be set before her to learn—lessons she refused to receive at the hands of love and happiness?





CHAPTER II.

ANNA COLET walked hurriedly away from the house in Mayfair, her cheeks flushing, and her lips compressing their roundness into determination and courage.

“ She would not even condescend to answer my question,” she said angrily to herself, “ and this is the woman for whom Llewellyn March would have died ! ”

She walked on rapidly through the squares of closed houses, and anon down the broad and comparatively deserted Piccadilly. St.

James's Church clock struck eleven. How tiresome it was; Max would be off on his rounds to visit his patients, and there would be no chance of a talk with him before evening, when he came home to dine, and perhaps even then some pressing need for the doctor might arise, and she would not see him until nearly midnight. Then she suddenly recollected for the first time how Max's daily routine had been broken the last day or two, how he had told her that this morning, even at twelve o'clock, Newton wished to see her on matters of business, for he had (so Max had said) "much to talk over with her."

There was no hurry then, her young light steps could easily make the rest of the distance in half-an-hour, and now it was but eleven. In the old days, Anna would have strolled into one of the parks and enjoyed a

quiet twenty minutes of fresh air, and bird singing, and the autumn brown and green of the grass, and trees, and more than all, her own thoughts. Now, however, all was changed. The tranquil, placid, half-wondering, half-musing Anna, had given place to a being all fire and nerve and energy, and a quiet half-hour of thought and inaction would have been in this chapter of her history not merely intolerable but absolutely impossible.

She had not realised in the slightest degree, the greatness of the change that had come upon her. Her mother's terrible story had awakened little more than a deep feeling of pity and commiseration for the poor misguided creature, who had wrought so much misery for herself and those around her. Her frank honest nature prevented her persuading herself into an appearance even of

affection towards either parent, which under the circumstances would have been unnatural. With regard to her father, she could ill repress a feeling of anger and indignation, as she thought of the miserable complication of circumstances which had arisen through his vacillation of purpose.

“He ought,” she said decisively to herself, “to have set one purpose before him and adhered to it. He had no right at the eleventh hour to disinherit his adopted son, and throw upon him the onus of finding the true heir.”

Youth judges harshly, and Anna straightforward, impetuous, and without guile, could make no allowance for the old man’s awakening conscience, and his anxiety to get rid of its burdensome secret. So she walked on hurriedly, impatiently, with jarring nerves, out of tune with herself for harbouring such

thoughts of condemnation towards parents she had never known, out of tune (very much) with Victoria, for her *hauteur* and want of heart, out of tune even with faithful Max and good old Newton.

“What can they want to talk to me about? What business can I have to arrange with them,” her thoughts ran on, “do they actually suppose I should consent to accept the smallest portion of Llewellyn’s fortune? The very idea is preposterous, Max at least ought to know me better,” and the little feet flew faster than ever over the ground, and the little fingers knocked a loud, long, quick impatient knock at the door of the old riverside house.

Max himself opened it.

“Why Anna, child, where have you been this morning?” were the words that rose to

his lips, but he checked himself in time, for what right indeed had he now to enquire into Miss Colet's movements, and morning walks.

"Oh, Max," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you are at home. I have so much to say to you," and she led the way into Max's little study, and noticing Newton only with a slight bow, commenced the subject that was burning into her brain.

"Oh, Max," she said taking both his hands in hers, and looking up in his face, "you who were Mr. March's oldest friend, and let him slip away without a word, will you not try to find him out, and bring him back to his home; tell him from me, I will not touch one farthing of his fortune, and that I only wish to be Anna Trego still, with you and Mamma for my brother and mother."

“Always Mr. March! How long would Anna continue to torture him in this way,” thought Max. Then he said aloud and bitterly—

“Anna, I have no power to bring Llewellyn March back to his home as you call it. He has made his own choice and must live out his own life, just as you and I must live out ours. Perhaps all things considered he has made the very best choice he possibly could have made. He needed a little awakening to the stern realities of life, for hitherto he has lived in a sort of pleasant dreamland. If he comes back it will be with broader ideas of men and things than he had before, and if he falls—well, he will but be one among some thousands of brave men!”

Anna turned her back on him without another word, but with her face flushed with anger.

“ Mr. Newton,” she said in a low tone, moving towards the lawyer, and emphasising each word, “ you, at least, loved him ; will you come with me and find him ? ”

“ With you ! Miss Colet ? ” exclaimed the old man, starting to his feet, “ with you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Anna calmly, “ why not ? No one it seems will take a message from me to him ; I suppose the only thing will be for me to take my messages myself ! ”

“ You ! Miss Colet ? ” ejaculates Newton.

“ Yes, I Miss Colet ! ” repeats Anna, “ it is not such a very wonderful thing after all that a young lady should take a little journey into France, to endeavour to save the life, it may be, of a near relative. Others perhaps,” with a scornful glance at Max, and a toss of her black wave of hair, “ have done as much for a friend ! ”

Max walks away to the window and looks across the narrow garden with its dusty trees and grass now beginning to show the autumn tints.

Newton appeals to him piteously.

“ Mr. Trego, talk to the young lady. Tell her it is impossible, not to be thought of ; she cannot put her inheritance away from her in this manner, and as for a journey to France at this time it could not be done ! ”

Max turns round—

“ I have no right, whatever,” he says coldly, “ to control Miss Colet’s movements.” Then he returns to his contemplation of the narrow garden once more.

There is a pause, Newton looks anxiously and nervously from one to the other. Anna stands calmly in front of him.

“ Mr. Newton,” she says at length, “ please

answer my question, will you come with me in search of Mr. March, or must I find someone else to go?"

"Miss Colet!" Newton begins, "you do not know—you have not considered."

"Yes, I have considered," interrupts Anna, "and will you kindly tell me what is the great and insuperable objection to my undertaking this journey? Is it the proprieties of life you are thinking of?" And the corners of her mouth are drawn down a little disdainfully.

"Well, I suppose they must be thought of, Miss Colet."

"I have thought of them," pursues the girl, "and now tell me, Mr. Newton, which do you consider weighs the heavier," and she balances one little hand against the other, "the proprieties which govern society,

or the life and happiness of a fellow-creature?"

"Anna," interrupts Max, suddenly turning upon her, "how do you know that the interest you are evincing in Mr. March will, in any way, contribute to his 'life and happiness,' to use your own words? Do you suppose a man is to be deterred from the path of life he has chosen because a young girl takes the trouble to run after him to convince him he is in some sort of personal danger, and offers him an immense bribe to come home, and take care of himself."

But directly the bitter, ungenerous words were spoken, Max would have given worlds to recall them.

Anna turns upon him furiously.

"I offer Mr. March a bribe!" she says, with wide opened eyes. "How dare you

insult me in this way? I have no bribe whatever to offer. I simply refuse to take possession of the home and the fortune he has been brought up to consider as his own, and because no one will take my message of refusal, I go with it myself."

Poor Max is now thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"I beg your pardon, Anna," he says, humbly. "I spoke hastily, but with no intention of wounding you."

Then a sudden resolution takes possession of his mind. He seems to see the end of it all clearly—the right end, the best ending to so much complication and misery. Llewellyn is free now, and as good and true a man as ever, no doubt. Anna is free, too, and holds his lands and fortune in her hands. What better arrangement could there be (putting

aside his own selfish interest in the matter) than that these two, so worthy of each other, should marry, and thus solve the difficulties of the case.

He turns to Newton.

"If," he says, quietly, "Miss Colet is resolved to go, you and she had better join the Red Cross Society, travelling by way of Belgium."

Newton looks up amazed. Anna turns gratefully to him.

"Thank you, so much, Max," she says, taking both his hands in hers once more. "Please forgive me for speaking so rudely to you just now."

Max withdraws his hands quickly. He can make the surrender of his life's happiness, but it must be in his own way, and without any show of feeling on the matter.

“We will do all we can for your comfort and protection on this journey, Anna,” he says, gravely, “and in the meantime, if you please, we will have no more bitter words.”





CHAPTER III.

WITH a bullet in his thigh, and with broken ribs, Llewellyn lay on his hard bed in the desolate farm-house. Elliott had left him with a promise of quickly returning with the ambulance doctor. "Keep up your courage, March," he had said. "Your wounds are not dangerous." Nevertheless the impression on his own mind was that Llewellyn would die. "How," he reasoned, "can he pull through another fever here without even the commonest necessities of life?"

With his hand on the door, he turned round to look his last at his friend, lying white and motionless on the bare boards. Then, constrained by some sudden impulse, went back once more, and pushing back the fair blood-stained curls from Llewellyn's forehead, kissed him as a father might a sick boy.

"Take care of him," he said to the younger woman, putting some money in her hand.

"*A quoi bon?*" replied the woman, bitterly.
"*Il va mourir comme les autres.*"

Elliott turned once more, and went out into the dark night. Llewellyn's eyes opened feebly, and rested on the door as it closed after him.

About a hundred yards from the house he met the chasseur (whom he had previously despatched) returning with the only doctor to be found at that time of night, and under

the immense pressure of work laid upon the staff. Elliott detained him only a few seconds to reiterate his injunctions to look well after his friend, and again repeating his promise to return in the morning to the farm-house, went on his way.

Whither! Why was it that on that night, impelled by some strange, undefined impulse, instead of taking the road to Metz, he once more turned his steps towards the gloomy battle-field?

The stars were shining out chill and white; some large house had taken fire on the heights above the dark valley, and burned with a dull, silent glare. The sounds of suffering and pain were hushed, and not a whisper broke the silence of the night.

Elliott alone, with a thousand or so dead

bodies around him, stood still, awe-struck and appalled.

This was not his first battle-field ; not the first time he had seen friend and comrade fall around him, and had watched life flicker, and struggle, and ebb out through some ghastly, gaping wound. Why was it that on this night, above any other, he should wander back to the scene of slaughter, and stand silent and thoughtful on the field of death ?

“Llewellyn may be right after all,” he thought. “There may be something of truth in his flights of fancy ! Strange that I, who refused and denied a God in a land where He is preached, and prayed to, and taught on every side, should here, in a scene like this, which one might suppose to be a

very master-piece of a triumphant devil, be led to bow before His majesty and power!"

Is it the subtilty and perversity of my nature which leads me to believe that a plain and simple answer to a difficult question cannot be a true one—in other words that the devil, the source and origin of evil, cannot have produced this picture of his own kingdom? Or is it that here, in a very Golgotha, I stand awe-struck and overwhelmed before this revelation of the inevitability, the unchangeableness, the vastness of the laws which govern life and death in this world?

All must bow to them, now as they did some thousand generations ago. All, evil and good, righteous and unrighteous, pure and foul, one law alike for all created beings.

Those poor lads lying there, with their curled, dainty heads and slender hands, had

mothers, or wives perhaps, who knelt and prayed, aye implored, of the good God protection and safety for their darlings amid the crash and thunder of the fight. Yet there they lie as dead and silent as any of those blood-stained *gamins* who will sell their swords for a few *sous*, and their lives for a drink of *bavière*.

What a waste of time, of breath, of prayer, of weepings in lonely chambers, and of kneelings on cold cathedral floors! How much simpler, and as effectual, would be a few short words that the law of their God might be done!

Yet how few of the purest and best of men would wish it done! They pray, hoping to alter God's laws, trusting that they may be revoked, held in suspension, or reversed to suit their particular convenience or

necessity. Yet if so much as by a hair's breadth these laws had been disturbed, the whole of created life would be swept away into chaos and oblivion.

For the law which deals out death and destruction is itself the guardian and preserver of life.

Strange that I, who refused to be taught the existence of a Divine Creator, in church or chapel, should find Him here in the slaughter of a battle-field, and bow before the vastness of His laws amid blood and torture !”

He had wandered unintentionally to the hill-side, where Llewellyn had fallen. The lad who had written the “foolish love-letter” lay still and silent by the side of Llewellyn's grand old charger, which had curvetted so bravely up the slope in the morning.

No kindly ministering hands had closed the

lad's dark eyes, and with a half-scared, half-piteous look they seemed to gaze upwards into Elliott's face under the quiet light of the stars.

"Poor boy," he said pitifully, "one might do a worse thing than send that scrap of letter to the little far-away sweetheart."

He stooped down as he spoke, to feel in the lad's breast pocket for the note.

"*Scélérat*," sounded a voice in his ears.

A French soldier, lying on a ghastly pile of mangled, lifeless bodies, with dying energy seized his still-loaded rifle, and aiming only too surely, fired.

The mists of death must have been hanging over the man's eyes, and he no doubt mistook his commander for one of those prowling wolves who lurk about battle-fields to rob the dead and dying.

Elliott fell without a sound or groan, shot through the heart by one of his own men!

And Llewellyn's eyes were fixed feebly on the door of the desolate farm-house, waiting for the friend who would never return.





CHAPTER IV.

“**M**Y life will become more easy as I get used to it,” thought Maria, about a week after her wedding, as she stood at her dressing-room window looking across the broad Yorkshire moor.

They had come (by Sir Charles Ogle’s choice) to the Yorkshire estate for the honeymoon.

“Don’t talk to me about Venice and Tyrol,” he had said, in reply to a suggestion from Lady Mary, “unless you can tell me for certain what diet they provide there.”

invalids in my state, or whether there are doctors likely to understand my peculiar constitution."

Lady Mary confessed her inability to do so, and the idea of a foreign tour was accordingly given up.

Only the day before the wedding Lady Mary and her niece had been greatly surprised by a communication from their lawyer, informing them that on waiting upon Sir Charles for his signature to the marriage settlement he had put his pen through the Yorkshire estates, which it had been an understood thing were to be included. "They are not entailed," the lawyer wrote. "No wrong will be done to any one by their settlement upon Lady Victoria, as Miss Oldfield is amply provided for by her mother's fortune. I asked Sir Charles if he objected to

giving me a reason for acting in this unexpected manner. 'Not in the least,' was his reply. 'I intend to leave them by will to my future wife, and should Providence send me a daughter the will shall remain intact. If, however, a son should be born, I should deem it right that these, the largest and most valuable of my estates, should descend to my heir absolutely, and not subject to any control from the mother.'

"I endeavoured to reason with him on the matter, how that he was departing from his implied, if not given, word, but found him singularly firm on the point for a man of his temperament.

"'I will meet your wishes, as far as possible,' he said. 'I will, immediately after my marriage, sign a will in favour of Lady Victoria,' and he at once gave me instructions

to prepare such a will to be ready for his signature on his return to London from his wedding tour.

“I am now awaiting your ladyship’s instructions how to proceed in this matter. I feel quite convinced Sir Charles will not be induced to alter his decision, and if, therefore, you are not disposed to yield the point, I think your ladyship should be prepared to consider the consequences that may ensue.”

“What is to be done, Victoria?” said Lady Mary, folding up the letter, which she had read aloud to her niece. “You have so completely managed this affair for yourself that I would not like to take it out of your hands now.”

Her aunt’s tones were cold and harsh, as Victoria knew well they could be at times,

and latterly there had somehow grown up a reserve and sense of estrangement between these two.

"I suppose it is much the same thing," said Victoria languidly. "It really will not affect me very much one way or the other."

"I thought," said Lady Mary bitterly, "the Yorkshire estates counted for somewhat in your calculations. In any case they ought to be considered, and it is possible that if you had a near male relative, Sir Charles would not be allowed to have his own way in the matter."

Victoria's heart beat wildly for an instant. Was this really a door of hope opening at the eleventh hour for her escape?

But no; it was too late now. She was not prepared to meet the consequences of an engagement broken on the eve of marriage.

If she could have slipped out of it quietly with Miriam's aid, it would have been another thing ; but to be "talked about" possibly for one whole season !

"It would be quite too terrible," she said to herself, her horror deepening and growing upon her, as she recollected one or two of her circle who had been thus "talked about" for a brief period ; how that the original tale had swelled and grown at afternoon tea parties, and gathered breadth and length in the lazy corners of club windows, till possibly the heroine of the little romance, had the tale been told her with its final colouring, would not have recognised the part she had played.

"No, she would not be 'talked about,'" said once more conventional, well-trained Victoria, and the true, better soul which had ventured for a brief moment to assert itself

was again consigned to a thrice sealed sepulchre.

“It is not, I think,” she said in the same languid tone, “worth making a fuss over. Things must go on now; we must eventually acquiesce in Sir Charles’ wishes, and it would be better to do so pleasantly than unpleasantly.”

Lady Mary made no reply. She watched Victoria’s face closely for an instant; but seeing no relaxation in the girl’s at one time mobile features, took up her pen and prepared to write the letter, according to her wish.

“Remember, Victoria,” she said once more, “you are acting in this matter entirely without advice from me.” Victoria rose to end the discussion.

“I don’t suppose,” she said, “when I see

the Yorkshire estates I shall find much to admire in them, certainly not enough to compensate me for a wearisome contention with Sir Charles and his lawyers on the matter. Miriam says the house at Maddingley is simply perfect, so I am quite sure I shall find it dreary in the extreme."

And dreary in the extreme it most assuredly was. Never, perhaps, did a young bride look out of the windows of her newly-entered home with a deeper feeling of desolateness and loneliness than Victoria did on the seventh day after her marriage.

The Baronet was taking his accustomed morning's siesta, and Victoria, left to her own devices, had again made the rounds of the house and its ill-arranged, if spacious, apartments, finally taking her stand at her

dressing-room window, once more to beat her wings against her prison bars, and to wonder if ever another opportunity of escape would be offered to her, and if she would have courage to make use of it, and then, feeling the wildness and impossibility of her wanderings, endeavoured to set her face as a flint to try and "get used" to the life now opening before her.

But life! It was a mockery to call the daily routine she was compelled to go through a life!

"I am no more a living being now than the little fossils shut up in those terrible chalk-hills opposite!" she exclaimed passionately.

Those dreadful chalk-hills; right, left, whichever way she turned her eyes those hills rose in front of her—white, barren, un-

changing—as though to remind her of the miserable, desolate, unfruitful life to which she had condemned herself.

“It was so bleak and cold, too,” and she drew a light shawl over her shoulders, so different to the dear old west country where she had been born and reared. “It is always an east wind blowing now, and there it was soft, sweet spring-time all the year round !”

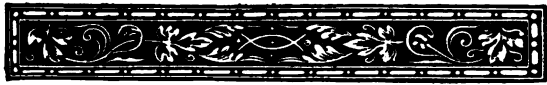
And once let her thoughts wander back to that lovely Cornish coast, and the moors, and streams and woodlands of her early home, when will they consent to return from that pleasant dreamland to the hard, stern realities of the life about her.

“I shall not attempt to forget Pentallack ; it will not do for me to try to put Castle Mount and Llewellyn March out of my thoughts. If I once make it a forbidden sub-

ject it will become a dangerous one to me. It is far better for me to think, and think and think over the past till I have thought away its sting and bitterness.

So the girl encouraged herself in the dangerous pastime, and for many a half-hour would stand gazing at those forlorn chalk-hills with thoughts far away in that lovely west country. Once more she stands hand in hand with Llewellyn March on Arthur's Ruin, once more she hears the music of the ball, and watches the flicker of the lamps in the darkness of the gardens, and anon hears the drear tolling of the bell which brought so much misery and desolation to her heart.





CHAPTER V.

MADDINGLEY, Sir Charles Oldfield's ancestral home, stands on somewhat low ground in a barren country of chalk and moor. Beyond the chalk stretches a lovely panorama of hill and dale, woods and streams, but none of this is visible from the Hall windows.

As the carriage, in which were seated Sir Charles and his bride, took the last turn in the road which brought them face to face with the Hall, Victoria was only conscious of one feeling in her heart—a sense of utter

desolation and never-to-be-lifted misery. Such a feeling as a criminal might have when, having said good-by to the world and his dear home ties, he enters the four prison walls, within which he knows he must pass the remainder of his life.

No cheerful blazing of lights, no joyous village children nor ringing of bells, no welcoming even of servants. The soberest of butlers conducted them into the house, the soberest of housekeepers duly presented herself for inspection to her future mistress, and Sir Charles, sinking into a chair, declared he felt himself altogether over-done, and how glad he was to find there had been no fuss made to greet his bride.

“The people about here know one thing, at any rate, and that is, that I cannot stand a fuss of any kind. It jars upon my nerves,

and altogether incapacitates me from the enjoyment of my life. Not that I get much out of it under any circumstances," he concluded, with a miserable shrug of the shoulders, and an order that "some sort of farinaceous food" should be brought to him. "The only kind of food I dare take so late in the day," he explained to Victoria.

And this was the man to whom she had literally sold herself. This was the school of discipline she had voluntarily entered for life.

Now that it was done beyond recall, now that she was tied down, bound body, soul and spirit, she saw how miserably, fatally weak she had been. Anna's scornful words were for ever sounding in her brain, "Break your bonds—fire will melt gold and bend iron!"

Why, ah, why had she not hearkened to her counsel while she held her life in her own

keeping, and, at any cost, broken her conventional fetters and claimed a heart and soul for herself?

Why? The answer came back clear and distinct from the better soul within—"Because you could not trust yourself to do so, because you, worldly-wise Victoria Cathrow, knew if you left yourself free and unfettered, you would give yourself back to the man you loved best. You knew you could not hold the two worlds—the world of wealth and fashion and the world of love and poverty—so you trampled the one under your feet, and then raised up barrier after barrier where-with to enclose and shut yourself in, lest it should rise up again and tempt you. Well! the barriers are strong and fast enough now, and the world of love and poverty lies hidden far enough from your gaze.

In the bright autumn sunlight Sir Charles's home looked even more dull and drear in the young wife's eyes than in the dim light of the ill-arranged candles and lamps.

Walking through the large, formal drawing-room, Victoria had suggested how much it would add to her comfort if the unsightly holland coverings might be removed from the sofas and chairs, and some pictures and china placed about the room.

"They are covered up because they are never wanted, Victoria," said Sir Charles, petulantly. "You will find no use whatever for this room. I never have callers here from one year's end to the other. My neighbours know well what an invalid I am, and have ceased persecuting me for the last fifteen years. You may have a few cards left, but I assure you that will be all. Do not, I

implore you, attempt to upset any of the arrangements of my house.

“Ah!” he added, with a sudden increase of energy, “if you would but turn your thoughts to something which more nearly concerns my health and comfort, if you would consult my doctor here privately about my diet, and what I ought or ought not to be feeding upon just now, you would be doing some real good; but pray do it quietly, I cannot be fussed over, you know.”

So Victoria gave up her drawing-room to its brown holland covers, in truth she cared very little about it one way or the other.

“Nothing matters very much now,” she said to herself, a sort of dull cold apathy stealing over her, and in accordance with her husband’s wishes she left orders that when

the doctor came the next day she wished to see him alone in her sitting-room.

Thither in obedience to her request he accordingly came. A cheery old man of some sixty years of age, with a broad northern accent, and a pleasant smile.

“So delighted to have the honour of making her ladyship’s acquaintance, trusted she was quite well.”

Victoria bowed and thanked the old man gratefully, it was the first cheerful voice she had heard since her inauguration as mistress of Maddingley.

Then awkwardly enough she approached her subject, she wished to consult him about Sir Charles’s health—appetite she had been on the point of saying, but fortunately checked herself.

“His health!” repeated the doctor.

“Have any fresh symptoms developed themselves?” he adds.

“No,” replies Victoria, wondering how she shall ever get round to the point. “But I am totally unused to sick-nursing, have in fact never crossed the threshold of a sick room before, so that I am feeling a little nervous and anxious.”

The doctor smiles pleasantly.

“Sick nursing, did you say, madam, believe me, none is required in this instance. Do not distress yourself, I beg. Sir Charles was never in better health than he is at the present moment. A little hypochondriacal perhaps, a little troubled with dyspepsia, nothing more I assure your ladyship. Such cases require kind but firm treatment, a too great indulgence to the patient fosters the disease, but with judicious management it can

be easily kept under. I assure your ladyship that Sir Charles is as likely as not to live for another twenty years, and that his constitution in the main is as good as your's or mine," and the doctor bows and withdraws, smiling at the kindly solicitude of the young wife, and wondering at the immense good fortune of the baronet in thus securing such a rare young beauty to share the miserable solitude of his country house.

"Another twenty years," thinks Victoria; "I am quite sure I shall not live through twenty years of this life," and again she feels like the criminal in the dock who hears the sentence of "penal servitude for life" read over his head. "Ah!" and the dangerous day-dreams creep over her once more. "What would twenty years of life have been by the side of Llewellyn March! How would

the long years have sped away like a watch in the night—as a tale that is told !” and as the terribleness of the contrast between what is and what might have been, forces itself upon her mind, she covers her face with her hands, a wail goes up out of the depths of the misery in her heart: “My God, my punishment is greater than I can bear! Is there no place of repentance to be found for such as I—no reprieve, no shortening of the sentence I have drawn upon my own head? Will this weary terrible punishment be for life?”

Yes, for life, if its end and purpose be not accomplished before life ends.

Only when the lesson is learned “by heart” will the book be closed and laid on one side for ever.



CHAPTER VI.

“**Q**H, for the wings of the wind,” was the thought of Anna’s heart, as with old Newton, and a maid in attendance, she set off on the journey which would bring her to the terrible fighting fields of Prussia and France.

Max had looked very grave over the whole affair, nevertheless he had been ceaseless and unremitting in his kind attentions, and thoughtful in the extreme as to her comfort and protection throughout her journey.

“We are all of us acting a little foolishly

just now," he had said, "but if it will satisfy you, Anna, to take this little trip into France and come back again, by all means do so. I can only hope for a better ending to it all than we deserve to have."

And Anna, beating her little hands together, and shaking back her long black hair, had but one reply to make. "Only let me go, Max! Only let me go!"—she had but one feeling in her heart now, a deep wild longing to take her hero's hands in hers, and give back into them the fortune they had so readily yielded.

She could not repress a sense of awkwardness when the parting came. Mrs. Trego had as usual acted entirely under Max's orders, and suppressing herself was only a little sadder, and more silent than usual.

Max was grave and thoughtful.

“Good-bye, Max dear,” said Anna, half shyly, “I fear you must think me very ungrateful.”

“No, not ungrateful,” replied Max, “only a little unlike yourself just now, a little carried away by force of circumstances, and a little self-willed in starting upon an expedition that can bring no good to any living soul.”

This was on the platform of the station whence they started by the Dover mail, and Max with the briefest and most matter-of-fact good-byes that he was capable of, drew his hat over his eyes, and walked away towards his home.

“Ah!” he thought, “she is well lost to us now! It is only the old story over again. Llewellyn rich or Llewellyn poor will be sure to carry the day with women’s hearts, and

what can I, plain uninteresting Max Trego, have to say against it? Anna breaks no faith with me, Llewellyn has nobly kept his pledge; if fate or fortune bring these two together, who am I, to place my life's happiness in between them! Still the old house will be dark enough without her sweet young face to light it up! God grant that Llewellyn may guard and cherish her, as I would have done, with my life!"

And Anna, speeding rapidly along in the Dover train, gave to poor Max only a very small share of her thoughts.

"Dear Max," she said, waving her good-bye to him, "how I wish he would fall in love with some good kind girl, who would look after him, and make him take care of himself! I don't believe in all the world there is one more genuinely honest and truly

unselfish, although a little bad tempered at times !”

Then Max and his bad temper gave place to other and pleasanter thoughts, of how, when, and where she and Llewellyn March would meet again, and anon these pleasant thoughts were succeeded by a dark terrible doubt and dread.

“What if there be no meeting for us in this world, what if I come too late !”

Before starting, Newton had made every possible enquiry as to Llewellyn and his unknown friend, at the address to which his clothes and papers had been sent in London ; with but small result, however, for the landlord of the little inn had not greatly interested himself in his sick guest and his friend ; “the dark gentleman, Ellis or Elliott, by name,” he had said, “he had heard once or

twice cursing the Prussians in right down earnest, so he should imagine they had joined the other side ; as for the fair gentleman, he didn't think there could be much fighting in him when he went away, for he could barely have recovered from his attack of fever."

On the strength of this information, Newton had telegraphed to influential friends he had in Paris, to ascertain, if possible, through the War Office, if two Englishmen, by name Elliott and March, had asked for or obtained a post of any sort in the French army.

Some little time elapsed before the answer came back (Anna chafing at the delay meantime); when it did come it was very brief, and merely contained the information that an Englishman, by name "Eillot," or something

similar, had obtained permission to join the army—[it was not known whether a command had been given to him]—and he had gone forward to the camp at Metz. About Mr. March nothing could be ascertained.

This was the whole amount of information they could obtain, and Newton, as he thought of the responsibility of the undertaking upon which he was launched, and the scantiness of his resources at command to bring it to a successful termination, could only hope with Max that it would have a better ending than they could reasonably expect.

Oh, the slowness, the hindrances of that journey! The crowded stations, the delayed trains, and the utter impossibility of obtaining respectable hotel accommodation or carriages of any sort along the line of route. They had decided to go by way of Brussels

to Luxemburg, and thence to Arlon, now become the great central dépôt for the stores of the Red Cross ambulances. Here Anna had decided upon adopting the usual dress and badge of one of the numerous societies then engaged in the succour of the sick and wounded, not only as a protection (to a certain extent) of her youth and sex, but also as a means of entrance and exit into places and among people where, as an ordinary visitor, she could have no chance of obtaining access.

“ Ah,” said old Newton, as he too pinned on the badge and cross of the Order, “ to think that I at my time of life should be starting on such an enterprise as this! If only I dared hope for some result to this wild goose journey! There is no fool like an old one, they say, and I fear my love for

these young people has made a fine fool of me."

At Arlon Anna's maid (an English girl, who ought to have known better), took fright, and begged to know if they were going still further on.

"Yes," replied Anna, "as far on as we can go, into Metz itself, if they would let us."

"Will there be any danger?" asked the girl.

"I don't know," replied Anna, "I don't think a great deal to us, but of course there may be casualties and accidents. If you are at all afraid you had better go back at once, for you won't have a chance later on."

So the maid went back to her mother and sweetheart, and Anna and Newton, after a brief rest at Luxemburg, took train to Saar-

bruck, intending thence to proceed to Courcelles, Newton always reserving to himself the right of directing Anna's movements from this point with a special regard to her safety.

At Courcelles they paused to collect their thoughts, and endeavour to arrange some sort of plan of procedure, Newton making one grand final effort to convince Anna of the extreme folly of the whole undertaking.

They were seated on their baggage, necessarily compressed into the smallest possible compass, outside the station, watching the continuous line of traffic which thronged the roads. Country people by the score taking up their farm produce of various kinds to the front; waggons loaded with all sorts of stores; flocks of sheep and droves of cattle; some press reporters, English and American, and a few tourists, looking somewhat be-

wildered with the novelty of the scene into which they were suddenly landed.

“My dear young lady,” said Newton gravely, taking Anna’s hand, “for the last time I beg of you to listen to reason. I want you to pause and think, and if possible take in the whole state of affairs. Now here we are, within nine miles of Metz, and little more than a stone’s throw from one of the great battle-fields, and yet, as far as I can see, not one whit nearer finding Mr. March than we should have been if we had remained quietly in England. Now, please, give me your closest attention. Mr. March and his friend, we are told, went on to join Marshal Bazaine at Metz, and the chances are in favour of the supposition that they are at the present moment in the camp with him on the slopes of the fortifications. If not, one

of two other things is almost certain ; either they have fallen in one of the great battles which have been fought, or else they have been taken prisoners by the Prussians. In any case, they are for the present lost to us, and our waiting here any imaginable length of time can do no possible good."

"Waiting here," said Anna, with wide opened eyes. "I haven't the least intention of waiting here another five minutes if we can help it. What was the name of the last battle they fought?"

"Gravelotte," replied Newton, feeling his last hope ebbing away.

A tall, kind-looking man, an Englishman or American, who had been watching them quietly for some little time, now came forward.

He lifted his hat to Anna.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, addressing Newton. “Did I hear you mention Gravelotte? I am just returning thence. You must not think of taking the young lady in that quarter. There are sights there which no woman should see!”

“You have come from Gravelotte,” said Anna, scarcely hearing the rest of his speech. “Tell me, where did they lodge the wounded after the battle?”

“Where?” repeated the gentleman, almost smiling at the simplicity of her question. “Just wherever they could find room for them. Some in churches, a vast number in a convent standing on one of the hills; farm-houses, chateaux, too, received a great many. But you will stand no chance of getting near them now.” He looked meaningly at Newton as he spoke. “There is a great deal of

skirmishing going on in that quarter, and the Prussians keep a strict look-out."

"No chance!" echoed Anna. "Have I come all these miles with one purpose in my heart, and then to be told there is no chance?"

Newton appealed to the stranger.

"Tell her," he said, "how hopeless it is. She has come here seeking for a near relative. Tell her what her chances of success are. Perhaps she will listen to you."

"My dear young lady," said the stranger gravely and kindly, "if you had come to nurse the sick and wounded, or minister to the poor famishing peasants about here, I should say you had done well, and bid you remain. But if you have come seeking for one sufferer among some tens of thousands, I say, be convinced of the uselessness of your quest and go home to your friends."

Anna scarcely listens.

"How near can we possibly get to the French lines?" she asks.

Again he looks at Newton.

"I scarcely know how to advise you," he replies. "If you are bent on going on to Gravelotte, there is, I believe, an expedition with stores leaving here to-morrow for Corney, and intending to push on rapidly to Rezonville. It is in charge of an English gentleman, and you could travel more comfortably thus than in any other way."

Now Anna jumps up, radiant.

"I scarcely know how to thank you," she says earnestly.

"But my dear young lady," interrupts Newton, "what do you intend doing?"

"This is what I intend doing," replies Anna, in lowest tones. "To visit every

hospital far and near, every farm-house, chateau, church, or convent, where men may be lying wounded, or sick; if there is a battle-field you will find me there; if there is a burying you will find me there. Into every man's face, be he living or dead, I will look till I find him I have come in search of!"





CHAPTER VII.

ANNA had over-rated her nerves, and physical, as well as mental, strength when she thus sketched out for herself so wide a programme ; yet none the less was she intent on fulfilling it to the utmost of her power.

At the first sight of blood and wounds she turned sick and faint, and the first batch of downcast and only half-recovered prisoners who passed along nearly broke her heart.

“What can be done? What can we do?” she exclaimed to Newton, and cover-

ing her eyes with her hands, she trembled from head to foot.

They had fixed their quarters in a little four-roomed cottage in the main street of the ruined village.

As they had passed through the town the first day of their arrival Anna had noticed an old woman of seventy or so, sitting knitting at a door, and had asked for a lodging.

The woman shrugged her shoulders, and told her she might come in and take what she could find. "There is plenty of room," she had said, "for you and the gentleman, for those who have left will never return."

Poor creature! she was alluding to her old husband and two sons, who had fallen at Courcelles.

Then she went on with her knitting again. Apparently she was becoming hardened to

the terrible sights around her. And after all, perhaps, she thought at her time of life nothing could much matter for long.

So Anna and Newton took possession of the half-furnished, dilapidated rooms, and did the best they could for themselves.

Anna, neat-handed and active in household matters, put the brightest appearances possible on the forlorn little household, and the old woman, rousing herself a little from her apathy, did her share of cooking and cleaning.

And now Anna's work began in earnest. She was true to her word, and commenced with a will to go through the hastily improvised hospitals which surrounded the little town. Everywhere, by French and Prussians alike, she was received with the extreme of courtesy, and her object (of which she made

no disguise) furthered as much as lay in their power. Her own colloquial knowledge of German was very small, and Newton's still less, but with a compound of the three languages, she managed to get on very well. She soon saw that Newton was evidently taken to be her father, and she was very well content to let things remain on that footing.

The suffering around her was so immense that it well-nigh overpowered her, and she felt her own sorrow and heart-ache sink almost into insignificance by the side of such overwhelming misery.

"If only one could do more for these poor souls!" she would say, returning from another day's fruitless search and toil. Yet not altogether fruitless, for Anna never entered cottage or farm-house without leaving behind her lighter hearts, and alleviating as far as

was in her power some poor creature's pain and sorrow, and although ever keeping her one great object in mind, she worked as hard as any of the nuns or volunteer nurses among the sick and dying. A day's search with her meant a day's hard work, and Newton began to fear that her health and strength must give way under the immense strain that was now put upon it.

Anna herself began to have some such fear in her heart.

"I shall keep up," she thought, "as long as my spirit lasts, but if once I lose hope, I shall break down altogether."

So she buoyed herself up with all sorts of fancies and imaginings, and painted to herself all sorts of pleasant pictures as to how, when, and where she and Llewellyn would meet again.

Her search took her sometimes into curious places, Newton, as a rule, in unvarying attendance, and interposing more than once to prevent her visiting some of the more terrible scenes of conflict, where traces of the sanguinary struggle still remained.

Once, when after a hard day's work in the church hospital, she was chatting with one of the nuns, and endeavouring to obtain scraps of information which might guide her next day's work, a convalescent, joining in the talk, hinted at the fact that in the dark lonely corners of the Bois de Vaux, many corpses were still lying unburied. Anna started, a deadly sickness came over her, and she shivered with cold. What if he, her heart's hero, were lying there, and this after all was to be their meeting-place!

She went home at once, but could not rest

nor sleep that night. A wild morbid feeling had taken possession of her, a terrible presentiment that there in the Bois, in one of those damp, blood-stained glades, Llewellyn March was lying.

The next morning she rose white and haggard, and begged Newton to go with her to the Bois.

“What for, Miss Anna?” asked he, knowing well what awful secrets that wood contained. “Why not go on with your hospital work, and let me do what you want done in the wood?”

But Anna would take no denial. Her decision of character had asserted itself now with irrepressible force, and no amount of reasoning or persuasion would turn her from her purpose.

To the wood they accordingly went. Anna

pressing forward with a wild eagerness and over-strained nerves, which showed only too plainly how greatly her work was telling upon her in mind and body.

The heavily trampled earth, the broken boughs and trees as they entered the wood, told how hard the struggle had been in that corner, and the many little mounds side by side made Anna's heart ache with the fear that after all the fate of the one she sought might lie hidden there.

Then, resting for one moment under a spreading beech tree, she saw a sight she never forgot, and which, for days and nights, haunted her sleeping or waking.

A large crow, rising lazily from the ground, flapped its wings almost in her face, perching on a low bough above her head, and, looking down, she saw at her very feet one of those

horrible sights which follow in the wake of war, and which, indeed, has made stouter hearts than her's quail.

"Take me home, Newton, take me home," she exclaimed, clinging to his arm sick and tottering. "Ah! surely God's curse must rest upon those who lighted the fire of this terrible war!"

Newton supported her in his arms, and how he got her back to the cottage he scarcely knew, but he felt, as he looked at her white, scared face that night, and saw her every now and again shudder as the recollection of that awful sight in the wood crossed her memory, that she could not keep up much longer, that, in fact, her nerves were getting beyond her control.

"I can't stand this myself," he thought,

“if it doesn’t soon end I must write to Max to fetch her home ! ”

But the end came sooner than he thought.

The day after their visit to the wood Anna rose, weak and languid, with a face which told only too plainly of a sleepless night.

“I think I will take a day’s rest,” she said to Newton, “I shall work all the better for it to-morrow.”

So she had remained quietly in the cottage all the morning, resting if not sleeping, in her own little bare room. Then, in the afternoon, feeling she wanted some fresh air, she stole down to the cottage door, and, leaning against the porch, listlessly watched the old woman at her everlasting knitting.

A young woman passed with a splendid baby-boy crowing on her shoulder. The little

fellow had possession of a cuirassier's brass helmet, picked up in one of the fields or hedges. There was an ugly deep dent on the front, and the child, after running his fingers up and down the tarnished metal, amused himself by fitting it on his head.

The woman turned round angrily and struck the helmet out of the child's hand.

"*Ne faites pas ça,*" she said harshly, "*est-ce que tu veux me quitter comme les autres?*" she added bitterly.

The child cried and sobbed, and Anna, instinctively holding out her arms to him, in another instant the little fellow was nestling round her neck, and she was soothing and fondling it.

Anna talked with the mother a few minutes, and then, as her wont was, asked if she knew whether there were any Englishmen lying

sick or wounded anywhere near. The woman's answer made her heart leap.

"Yes, there was one lying in her own house, nearly recovered. But *Dieu!* how ill he had been. An officer and a chasseur had brought him to the house on the night of Gravelotte. The officer, also an Englishman, had given her money, and had left saying he would come back again, but he had never returned.

Anna listened eagerly. Two Englishmen! What if one were Llewellyn!

"What is your Englishman like?" she asked the woman. "Has he large, shining blue eyes and bright golden hair, *comme la chevelure de ce petit là?*" and she smoothed the little fellow's curls tenderly.

"Ah! Madame," replied the woman, somewhat sulkily, "there are two many golden heads among us just now," and she pointed

to a knot of fair-haired Bavarians who were strolling leisurely up the village street.

Anna's heart beat wildly. Possibly it might not be Llewellyn after all. Still she might, perhaps, hear of Elliott through this man, or gain some information to guide her movements. At any rate it was a chance worth trying, so giving the child back to his mother, she told her she would like to go to her home, and see and speak with this Englishman.

On their way, Anna asked her how she dared remain in such a dangerous neighbourhood with her child. The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"It was my home, Madame. Before the war we had a large and prosperous farm. There were my husband, and his two brothers, and my father; they worked and tilled the

land, and God sent us plenty. Then the war began, and they took the men away to fight. My father fell the first at Courcelles; my husband and his brothers two days after at Vionville. The Prussians came down after Gravelotte, and took possession of the house for their sick and wounded, and carried away all they wanted of our farm-stock and cattle."

Anna shuddered. True, it was only one story of a thousand, but hear the sad tales as often as she would, they never ceased to cut her to the heart, and bear down her spirit.

As they neared the house Newton, who accompanied them, asked a few questions about the Englishman, what manner of man he was.

"I scarcely know, M'sieur," replied the woman. "He suffered a great deal, and I think would have died if the Prussians had

not come down with their stores and doctors, and after that the nuns and nurses. He never complains, and he seldom talks, but when he does, his voice is gentle and very courteous."

"Gentle and very courteous." Yes, that would describe Llewellyn's manner perfectly, and Anna's heart beat again, and she felt something of her old spirit and energy return to her.

They entered by the half-shattered gate, and following the woman's directions, pushed back the door, and went into the long, low kitchen.

It bore a very different appearance to what it had done the night Elliott and the chasseur had laid Llewellyn on the bare floor. The doctors and nurses, with their stores at command, had wrought an almost magical transformation. Neat mattresses were ranged

against the walls, tables with all sorts of nourishing food were placed here and there within reach of the patients, a small fire blazed on the hearth, and a neatly dressed nurse, with a sister of charity, presided over the impromptu hospital.

The men in different stages of convalescence lay, or leaned, on their mattresses. An order had gone forth that on the morrow they were to move forward to make room for other poor sufferers, and the order was being variously discussed.

Anna paused on the threshold, eagerly scanning the faces of the men. Prussians from Frenchmen; yes, clothe them how you would they were easily distinguishable. But where was the Englishman?

At her very feet almost! Leaning with one elbow on his paper pillow with his back

to the door, and his eyes fixed on the dull, narrow window panes, was Llewellyn March.

As the nurse came forward to meet the visitors, he turned his head, and the afternoon sunlight fell upon his white worn features, and lighted up the weary listless look of the once bright blue eyes.

With a great joyous cry, he sprang forward to meet her.

“Anna, dear little Anna, come back to me once more !”





CHAPTER VIII.

STILL holding her hand in his, he led her through the half open door into a little room off the kitchen. The still room it had been in the old prosperous days of the farm, but was now turned into a receptacle for the numerous cases, packed and unpacked, with which private benevolence had supplemented the doctor's work.

“What is it, Newton—what does it mean?” he enquired, as he greeted the old man warmly and affectionately. “What, in Heaven's name, has brought you two from

your comfortable homes in England to face such sights and scenes as we have here?"

Newton looked at Anna; was he to speak, or would she? But her eyes were downcast, her hands trembled violently, and a deep crimson was mounting up to her very forehead.

For in truth the difficulty of the task before her had only just dawned upon her. It had never once entered her mind throughout her tedious journey and long days of hard work that when she found Llewellyn March she would not know what to say to him. She had thought the words would come rushing from her heart to her lips, or that he would have read it all in her face before she spoke. She knew if she had found him dying on a battle-field her great love would have broken forth, and she would have put

her arms round his neck, and claimed him for her own; or if she had discovered him lying sick and untended in one of these poor cottages, she would have waited on and watched him night and day till she had forced death to give up its hold, and perhaps Llewellyn, awakening up to love and gratitude, had prayed "little Anna" to stay with him for ever and ever. These had been the pictures she had sketched out in fancy's dream, and in each of which she could have acted her part, but she was totally unprepared to have him standing thus before her—convalescent, certainly, well almost—and to hear him ask, in that calmly astonished tone, what it all meant!

Newton was the first to speak.

"I assure you, Mr. March," he began, "it was much against my wish, and Mr. Trego's,

that the young lady undertook this journey, but Miss Colet—”

Then he paused. It would have made matters so much easier if he might have called Anna by some other name ; but thus to bring the fallen favourite and the heiress face to face, and then proclaim her title in his ears, made the miserable confusion fifty times worse.

“ But Miss Colet would come ? ” asked Llewellyn, almost smiling at his old friend’s over-sensitiveness, and turning to Anna enquiringly.

It did not occur to him for one instant that Anna and Newton had gone through all these disagreeables and hardships for his sake, to find him, and bring him back.

“ Ah ! You see, Mr. March,” began Newton again, “ your going away left an ugly

gap among your old friends, and there were many hearts aching for you."

"No, not that," exclaims Anna, stumbling and confused, and correcting herself in one breath. The old man will make Llewellyn think she has come all this way to make love to him. "Yes," she resumes, "it was true, but there is something else. I had a message for you, Mr. March, which no one else would bring—which I could trust no one else to bring," she corrects herself again.

Llewellyn's eyes express a simple wonder, and almost unconsciously the faintest shadow of a notion flits through his brain, that it is possible, of course wildly improbable, that this message in some way concerns Victoria. "A message," he repeats slowly, "may I ask from whom?"

Anna's jealous eyes detect the half-uttered thought.

"I am speaking badly—my thoughts are a little confused I think; I will be more straightforward. It was right I should come, because the message to be brought was my own."

She is beginning to nerve herself now for the encounter she feels sure will ensue, and tries to steel her heart to bear the death-blow of her unconsciously cherished hopes, for his warm kind words tell her as plainly as could the most icy reserve or frozen politeness—"I have plenty of kindness and affection in my heart for you little Anna, but nothing more."

"This is it Mr. March," she goes on, almost surprised at herself and her own calmness, "you left England under the im-

pression that your fortune and estates had passed from your hands ; this, however, was a mistake, for I have refused to accept either, and I have come here to tell you so ! ”

“ You ! Little Anna ! ” exclaims Llewellyn almost rapturously gazing down into the girl’s feverishly flushed face, and scarcely restraining himself from kneeling at her feet in the greatness of his joy. To think that he, Llewellyn March, slipping away as he thought so easily into suffering and oblivion, should after all have had hearts like these good true ones thinking and caring for him ; one girl had put him on one side for the sake of a fortune, now he sees another put aside a fortune with equal indifference and carelessness. Thank God for this vindication of the goodness and heart-singleness of human nature !

For the moment as Newton watches him, he thinks—

“He will accept his own again. Ah, I felt sure it would all come right!” forgetting his dismal forebodings of yesterday.

Llewellyn soon undeceives him.

“Now I am confused, I really have no words to express my deep gratitude to you, Anna. Is it possible that you came through all these (to a woman) perils to tell me this? And did you really, honestly in your own heart, think I should accept this sacrifice at your hands?”

“It is no sacrifice,” she replies hurriedly; I have been brought up to think myself a very small person as far as wealth and fortune goes, and as such I wish to remain. Believe me I am utterly unsuited for so dignified a position as the one you wish me to

fill, and please, please, take back your inheritance and come home to us all," she halts and struggles through the latter part of her sentence. Her strength is giving way now, she trembles so violently she can scarcely stand.

Oh, if she could but run away somewhere and hide herself, and never look upon his face again!

And Llewellyn, looking down into the sweet young face, sees a look in it which troubles him, and which in truth he never saw there before.

"Anna," he says almost tenderly, "I shall be very glad, very thankful to be back again among my old friends by and by, and blame myself more than I can say, that I ever left them; but just now I want to talk about yourself, your inheritance, not mine, as you so generously call it."

Anna's hands are stretched out as though she would put away from her this unseen inheritance, and her head averted, as though she would not look upon it.

Something in her attitude forcibly recalls to him fair young Lady Jane Grey declining England's crown, and for one brief moment, the thought flashes through his brain—

“Is it well thus to force this heritage upon one who so persistently puts it from her?”

Only for one moment, however, he hesitates, then he renews the appeal.

“Anna, in the old days, I remember you used to have a wonderfully clear sense of what was right, and what was wrong, I appeal to you simply on this ground. Is it right, can anything justify a man or woman in putting aside responsibilities, and refusing to fulfil duties which devolve upon them?”

There is no reply, only the out-stretched hands fall down to her side, and the flushed face grows deadly pale.

“Take her home Newton,” says Llewellyn in a low voice, almost angrily to the old man, “you ought never to have brought her here.”

Anna fires up once more.

“I came here of my own free will,” she exclaims, catching her breath, “why do you so persistently put me away from you—why do you?”—she breaks down utterly now, the words have escaped her all unawares, she sinks down on one of the over-turned casks, and covers her face with her hands.

“Mr. March, don’t you see! How can you?” pleads old Newton.

Llewellyn turns his back on him.

“Anna, dear,” he begins, more tenderly

perhaps than before, and laying his hand on her shoulder, "we all of us make mistakes at times in our lives; I have made a very grievous one, will you try to learn a little wisdom from my folly?"

The girl makes no reply—does not uncover her face. Llewellyn goes on, "A little while since a terrible blow fell upon me (no, dear, I don't allude to the discovery of your relationship to Sir Geoffrey, *that* was no blow) the one in whom I trusted, failed me, and the shock almost stupefied me, I think. You know what I did, Anna, how I threw up my arms and cried out I was wounded, and fled as a dumb animal might to hide himself. Will you do *that* little Anna? Then as I began to recover my senses what did I do? Still obeying my lower animal instincts, I cried out, 'I cannot bear this pain, this

burthen is too heavy for my strength,' and forthwith rushed into conflict, action, movement, anything to dull and deaden feeling, and proceeded to bind upon my weak shoulders fifty other burthens, thinking I could let them drop at any time? Will you act thus wildly, little Anna? Think how much more noble it would have been, had I stood still and steadfast to bear the shocks of fortune, had I stayed in my own place, and done my life's work bravely, resolutely, irrespective of the pain or happiness which might fall to my lot. True, I may turn round some day and say to the one who dealt the blow, 'you have taken some good years out of my life.' But ought I to have allowed my years so to be taken? Were they not my own to keep, and to use for my own and my fellow creatures' good, and should I not have held them

fast as my very birth right, that no man nor woman could wrest from me?"

Again he paused, and Anna, slowly drawing her hands from her face, looked up white and resolute.

"I will go back," she said, "God knows I have no reason to stay here;" then she added with a half-passionate sob, "perhaps He will be more merciful than you who will force upon me this miserable wealth, and will take *me* away from *it*."

Then Llewellyn turned upon her passionately.

"Oh, Anna, Anna, do not wish away your sweet young life, because you feel weak to bear a load of wealth and honour. Think for one moment what that life may be made to yourself and others. Do not, I beseech you, take it in your own hands, and throw it away

as I have been tempted to do ;” then as the thought of Max, and his long years of patient love for the girl came before his mind, he added, “ think Anna of your own home ties, of those who have loved and cherished you your whole life through, have you no duties and responsibilities toward them—ah, if I dared ! ”—he felt now, indeed, he trod upon delicate ground, and scarcely knew how to take the next step—“ if I dared I would tell you of one you might make glad and rejoice to the end of his life, by a little of the love and sunshine out of your own heart ! ”

Anna looks up in perfect amazement. “ Whom can you mean ? Not Max ; I have loved him all my life through, as my own brother.”

Llewellyn makes no reply, he dare not say another word ; the girl’s cheeks are flushing

angrily enough, as she reads the affirmative in his face. What can it all mean?

"How do you know this?" she asks.

"What has Max been saying to you?"

Doubts and suspicions flash through her mind. Ah, she sees it all now; the reason of Llewellyn's coldness and Max's bad temper—she has been talked over, quarrelled over between them, and Llewellyn bound down to act as he has towards her. Her voice trembles, she loses all self-control.

"How dared you two men," she demands, angrily, asking for an answer to her unspoken thoughts, "talk of my love together, and toss it from one to the other as though it had been offered to either of you?" Again she covers her face with her hands, and quivers from head to foot.

Llewellyn is white now with well kept-under indignation.

“Anna,” he said, “if a man had said this to me, I should have known how to answer him; you ought to know Max and myself better than to suppose us capable of acting thus!” He tries to take her hand, but she withholds it stubbornly. “I know when you think over this quietly you will regret your hasty words. I know your good true heart will triumph in the end, and that where I have been tempted and fallen, you will conquer and stand upright!”

Anna rises from her seat, white and tottering, and looks him full in the face, answering not so much his words as what she imagines to be the thoughts of his heart.

“You are true,” she says, scornfully, “to your false-hearted love!”

“No, Anna,” he replies, “I am true to my true-hearted friend!” He follows her as she turns towards the door, and takes her still

trembling hand in his. "God bless you, little Anna," he says, "and send you peace and happiness!" Anna gives him one last look, which will live in his memory till his dying day, and slowly passes through the gate with old Newton.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Llewellyn, going back to the kitchen-hospital, "this has been worse than Gravelotte!"





CHAPTER IX.

“**F**OR the last five minutes, Victoria, you have been standing like a statue at that window,” said Sir Charles Oldfield, peevishly, to his wife. “You look as solemn as though you intended writing one of Miriam’s ‘Autobiographies of a Repentant Sinner, in three volumes!’”

Victoria turns round, stately as ever, more than ever frigid, “If I wished to write my life’s history, I could do it in one word,” she replies.

“And that word would be—?”

“Regret!”

There is a pause. The husband looks at the wife, the wife at the husband, and for a few moments the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece is distinctly heard.

They have returned to their London house in Eaton Square for the winter months, as Sir Charles cannot possibly face the frost and snow without a choice of physicians at his elbow, and the hearty, good-natured Yorkshire doctor, with his half-concealed disposition to laugh at the Baronet’s fancies, is scarcely to his taste.

Miriam, with her “latest clerical novelty,” the Reverend Anthony Everhard, is seated in a corner of the library, her bonnet as usual by her side, and a long list of names in her hand. These she is pricking off with a pin, or crossing through with a pencil, as proper

or non-proper recipients of Christmas charities.

She looks up, pin in hand ; Victoria has thrown down the gauntlet, most certainly she will take it up.

“ Perhaps,” she says, giving a very decided prick to the name next on the list, “ there may be cause for regret on the part of others besides yourself, but they have had the good taste not to express their feelings so openly.”

Victoria makes no reply ; to discuss any question whatever with Miriam would be disagreeable in the extreme, but to discuss a question with her as to what was or was not “ good taste,” would be simply an impossibility. She gathers together her implements for fancy embroidery, and sweeps out of the room.

Now Sir Charles begins. "If, Miriam," he says, "you quarrel with my wife in this way, whenever you meet, you may as well send for the undertaker at once, for my nerves will not stand this perpetual jarring. I imagined, when I married; a life of peace was opening before me, and that my tastes and wishes would receive a fair amount of consideration."

"Yes," interrupts Miriam, sarcastically, "you thought your daughter treated you badly enough, but at least she never insulted you. Little attention as you received from me, I feel sure you will have still less at Lady Victoria's hands."

Everhard has been fidgetting and uncomfortable during this discussion.

"I am quite aware," he begins, "on such a purely family matter I ought not to have

an opinion, but I really think you are judging Lady Victoria harshly. I have known her a few years, and have always been charmed with the sweetness of her disposition and manners."

"Manners!" exclaims Miriam, catching at the latter word. "Yes, it is all manners, and nothing more. I, too, imagined when my father married again that he would find the kindest of nurses in his new wife—in fact that he would be entirely taken off my hands, but we are thoroughly undeceived now. I can plainly see that she is far too selfish to think of any one beyond herself."

"I really think you are making a mistake." Everhard cannot resist putting in a plea for the young girl he had seen not so very long since at Castle Mount under such very different circumstances.

Miriam turns the point of her pin towards him, and raises her head high in the air. "We are told," she says, "that 'in the last days men shall be lovers of their own selves, proud, boasters'—that is exactly what she is." And Everhard feels himself completely borne down.

At this time the will which was to have given to Victoria the Yorkshire estates, still remained unsigned.

Lady Mary Cathrow had spoken her mind freely to Victoria on the subject.

"Sir Charles should be reminded of this, and at once," she had said. "If you had a father or brother they would not hesitate to do so. The state of the case is simply this. If Sir Charles were to die suddenly, you would find yourself very ill-provided for indeed; you would merely take one-third of

the property which is not mentioned in any will, while Miriam, already well provided for, will take two. As for the settlement, it is little more than a pretence. My lawyer tells me that the whole of the property included in it would not bring you in five hundred a year. Of course, he may live for many years to come, (Victoria winced visibly at this) or you may have children, whose claims, no doubt, ought to be considered. But in the meantime, if he should die, I repeat, you will find yourself very inadequately provided for."

The whole subject was very distasteful to Victoria. Yet, after the great show of worldly wisdom she had made, she felt compelled to conceal her real reluctance to enter upon the subject.

"I suppose," she said, "the lawyers would

be the right people to talk to him about these things."

"They have already endeavoured to do so," replied her aunt. "Messrs. Brevet and Cooke have written twice to him calling his attention to the fact that the will which he gave them instructions to prepare remains in their hands unsigned, and he has not even replied to their letters."

"Ah," said Victoria, with a shudder, "those must have been the letters which annoyed him so the other day."

And her mind goes back to two particularly black days in her far from rose-coloured calendar, when Sir Charles's breakfast, lunch, and dinner had in succession been sent away untasted, and his indignation and irritability had been poured forth in turn upon Victoria and the *chef*.

“I think of us two,” Victoria had said on this occasion, “the *chef* has rather the better time of it. He knows he has but to stand silent, and the storm must pass over his head, and he can return to his saucepans and culinary art for consolation; whereas I am expected to answer and soothe, or else answer and irritate, as the case may be, and have no saucepans at hand to take refuge in.”

It was very true. Of the two the *chef* had most certainly a far better time of it than Victoria, although his post in Sir Charles’s household was not a very desirable one.

“Penal servitude for life,” was Victoria’s first thought in the morning and the last as she lay down to rest at night, and underneath all, and beyond all, lay the consciousness—

“Better things were offered to me, and I put them on one side and went into captivity of my own free will.”

Of Llewellyn's fate she knew nothing, and although hungering and thirsting absolutely for news of him, there was no one of whom she dared make enquiries.

She never heard his name mentioned by mutual friends ; for, after being about a nine days' wonder in society, he and his sudden reverse of fortune had given place to later and livelier topics of conversation.

Whether Anna had really undertaken the journey in search of him she had no means of ascertaining, dared not even send her maid to enquire at the old river-side house, so closely she felt she was watched by Miriam's and kindred pairs of eyes.

Once, when out driving, she had desired her coachman to return by the river, in order that she might pass the old house, but its dusty, venerable face told her nothing beyond the fact that Dr. Trego gave "Advice gratis from 9 till 10 a.m."

"If only I knew he were dead it would end this miserable suspense," she thought. "Or if I could hear that he had forgotten me and married some one else how glad and happy I should be."

Then she would begin wondering about Anna, and whether it would "end in anything" with her. She shows, too plainly, she is in love with him—

"I am quite sure she is not his style. He always admired fair-complexioned, golden-haired beauties, and she is dark and

gipsy-like; and, great heavens, what a temper! I am quite certain no man would live a life of peace with her!"

So she would sit and wonder, in the dangerous dreamland of the winter twilight when Sir Charles's occasionally prolonged after-lunch naps gave her a little time for rest and reflection.

The house in Eaton Square was perhaps a little less dreary than the one among the Yorkshire wolds; at any rate, those white-faced, barren chalk-hills were not for ever glinting and glaring at her as though they said—"We have you fast now—fast for life."

There was, however, one terrible drawback to the London house—Miriam was resident there nearly all the year round.

"I hope you will recollect, Victoria," Sir

Charles had said to her on the day of their arrival at Eaton Square, "that Miriam has been accustomed to be mistress in this house, and I trust her arrangements will not in any way be interfered with."

"What do you mean?" asked Victoria, in the iciest of tones. "Do you wish her to remain mistress still?"

"No; not exactly that," he replied. "Not take your place at table and that sort of thing, you know; but I do not wish any existing arrangements to be upset."

Victoria bowed acquiescence. Indeed, she felt how utterly impossible it would be for her to attempt to rule a household that had been governed so long by Miriam and Miriam's notions, and not having sufficient energy to wish to disturb "existing arrangements," was very well content to leave the

reins of government in the hands that had held them so long.

Once, indeed, she had ventured to suggest that the butler's appearance was not quite so agreeable as it might be, and that his manner was not exactly, in the dining-room, what a butler's was supposed to be.

She was met by an indignant rejoinder from Miriam.

"I do beg," said the latter, "that no such remarks may be made in my presence regarding poor George and his appearance. Appearances are not always to be depended on." This with a significant up and down look at Victoria. "George, I admit, was a confirmed drunkard at one time; his wife was a confirmed drunkard also. But I have been the unworthy instrument to pluck these brands from the burning, and woe

to me if I let them fall again into Satan's hand!"

So Victoria yielded the point, as she had yielded others before, and it must be confessed that in all her encounters with Miriam the latter invariably came off victorious, conquering by sheer strength of will and force of character.

Thus the winter months slowly passed. To Victoria the saddest, dreariest winter it had ever been her lot to live through. Little or no society was received at the house. Very few, indeed, who had once crossed the threshold, and spent an afternoon or evening at Sir Charles Oldfield's, ever had the courage to renew the experiment.

It must also be admitted that Victoria, in spite of her rare beauty, was not particularly attractive to society in general in those

days. Her stateliness had resolved itself into frigidity; her repose of manner into languor and apathy.

"Positively Arctic," had been one old gentleman's verdict upon the young wife. "And a beautiful statue, nothing more!" had been the conclusion of society at large.

So Victoria attracted few friends or acquaintances to her side, and the few she did attract Sir Charles utterly repelled.

"I cannot stand the buzzing of afternoon tea-parties, Victoria; they jar upon my nerves," he had very speedily informed her, after a feeble attempt on her part to procure in that way some little alleviation from the strain of her own thoughts. Dinner parties were a simple impossibility.

"To sit at a table where there would be the chance of the odour of veal or duck!

Wheugh !” And Sir Charles shuddered again.

Evening parties were equally impracticable. Miriam had but one opinion on such things.

“ They are the decoys of Satan, to draw souls to himself,” she said, positively, to Victoria, anxious to convert the latter to her own ideas ; “ would you like to be called away in the midst of a waltz or galop, or have to give up your soul with a quadrille band sounding in your ears ? ” she enquired, solemnly.

“ Yes, with any sound in my ears, so long as it were given up I should not care,” Victoria replied impetuously, making for the door as she spoke, to escape from the volley of argument which she knew would pursue her.

And once in the solitude of her own room

the ghosts of the past would rise up, and stare her in the face. There was no escape from them then, and worse than all no wish to escape, for the ghosts of her memory were far more precious to her than the real living faces about her, in spite of the reproach which looked out of their shadowy glances, and the answering remorse in her own heart.

Sometimes she would attempt to stifle the remorse, and to look away the reproach in these "quiet-eyed" ghosts.

"I only did what nine girls out of ten would have done. I was perfectly unsuited for being the wife of a poor man, and had no right to keep him in bondage to a promise?" Then the answer would ring out sharp and clear in the silence of her soul. "You have not to answer for the sins of nine-tenths of mankind, but only for your own. Would he

have reckoned the fulfilment of his promise a bondage, or have asked for his release? and Victoria, Victoria, what now?"

"It is too much, too much," she had more than once exclaimed, as one voice would rise above another in reproach and regret, and one shadowy picture would only give place to another, painted in yet sterner colours. "They will haunt me, and haunt me till I go mad, I think, and end my days in some terrible manner."

And all this time no tidings of Llewellyn March.

Once she thought she would ask Everhard if he had had news of him since he left England, and summoning all her courage, contrived one morning, when Miriam was out, and Sir Charles dozing in his chair, to lead the conversation to Castle Mount, and Sir

Geoffrey Colet, remarking how she longed for a breath of the salt Cornish air, how often she thought of the roses in the little flower garden at Pentallack, and then after a pause how strange it must be to the neighbourhood to have Castle Mount without a master!

Everhard looked very grave when Castle Mount was mentioned.

"Yes," he said, "although I lived at Castle Mount some ten or twelve years of my life, I do not think I shall ever care to enter the place again. Sir Geoffrey was very good to me, and good to my father before me—he gave him the living of St. Olave's, you know, where he died—but there was a very great deal of mystery about Sir Geoffrey's illness and death, a great deal evidently had been kept in the back ground, and I cannot quite

exonerate Mr. March, although very unwilling to pass judgment upon him."

Lady Victoria's face expressed her wonder. "I do not see," she said, in the lowest of tones, "how Mr. March is to be blamed for anything that happened."

Everhard fidgetted and looked uncomfortably at the sleeping Baronet. He did not like the turn the conversation had taken, especially considering the relation in which Mr. March had at one time stood towards Lady Victoria.

"I did not say," he began, "that Mr. March was in any way to be blamed for the unfortunate circumstances attending Sir Geoffrey's death, but I repeat that a little more candour and openness on his part, especially towards his oldest friends, would have placed matters on a far better footing."

“Mr. March was candid enough towards those who had a right to demand candour at his hands,” Victoria was on the point of saying, but, however, restrained herself. What right indeed had she of all people in the world to take up weapons in defence of Llewellyn March, and the line of conduct he had chosen to adopt. So with a curiously flushing face, and a quickly beating heart, she asked in the most indifferent tone she could assume, “whether he had heard anything of Mr. March since he left England in the autumn?”

“Mr. March!” began Everhard.

Sir Charles turned and started in his chair. “March, March,” he exclaimed, “who talks of going to the sea-side in March? As if I, with my delicate lungs and throat, could face a March wind anywhere,” then he grew wide

awake. "Was I dreaming?" he asked, turning to Victoria.

"I think you were," she replied quietly, but none the less, she knew that had Miriam entered the room at that moment the miserably conscious look on Everhard's face, and the single utterance of the monosyllable "March," would have betrayed to her observant eyes the fact that Lady Victoria Oldfield had been asking for tidings of her late lover.

And not for many months after that did the tidings come.





CHAPTER X.

THE day following Llewellyn's interview with Anna was gloomy and depressing to him in the extreme. Over and over again did he charge himself with having acted cruelly and harshly towards her.

“She has gone away,” he said, again and again to himself, “with the thought that I have not appreciated the generosity of her offer, that I am too much wrapped up in myself and my own sorrows to be able to give her more than a passing thought, while Heaven knows her sad eyes and quivering mouth will haunt me to my life's end.”

Newton came again to see him in the early morning, looking anxious and distressed.

"How is she, Newton?" was Llewellyn's first question.

"I hardly know, Mr. March," he replied. "She is very white, and very quiet, and has only spoken about half-a-dozen words since yesterday."

"If only I could have acted otherwise," groaned Llewellyn.

"If only you could," echoed Newton. "It would have been far better for yourself, and Miss Colet also." Then he shook his head. "I fear much we shall, all of us, have cause to regret what happened yesterday."

"Regret!" said Llewellyn. "It is all regret from beginning to end. This is what it is, Newton, if I had stayed in England, and myself settled the possession of Sir

Geoffrey's estates, this would never have happened. What right, indeed, had I to shirk the responsibilities and duties which devolved upon me; what right, indeed, to throw them upon you, or any one else! I yielded weakly to force of circumstances, I bowed before them, and now instead of ruling them, they are ruling me with a rod of iron!"

"Don't blame yourself in that way, Mr. March. Heaven knows you have had enough to bear!"

"To bear!" repeats Llewellyn, scornfully. "And how did I bear it? Not even with the patience and strength of a beast of burden! If I had stood the shock without flinching, if I had stayed in my own place and done my own work instead of fleeing in this cowardly way, as it were, for my very life,

all this complication and misery would never have happened ! ”

“ You can’t tell that,” replied Newton. “ I am not so sure. It is not for us to arrange our lives.”

“ Yes, it is for us to do so, Newton,” interrupts Llewellyn. “ A man’s life is in his own hands far more than we are willing to admit, and it is not for him to yield its control to chance or circumstances, as I have been weak enough to do ! ”

Newton looks at him wonderingly.

“ I don’t believe,” he says, “ there is another man in all the world who would lay the blame of all this trouble upon himself as you do ! ”

• Llewellyn does not hear him.

“ Can you not explain matters to her a little, Newton ? ” he asks. “ Could you not

make her understand, better than I did, how truly I appreciate her munificence and generosity, how much real affection I have in my heart for her?"

"Thank you, Mr. March, I would rather not," replies Newton. "I would far sooner not allude to this subject again to Miss Colet. I could not make matters better; I might make them fifty times worse!"

"Then things must go on in this miserable way?"

"I fear they must."

Llewellyn says no more; he walks impatiently to and fro the narrow court-yard of the farm, Newton leaning meantime against the shattered gate.

"I suppose, Mr. March, you are a prisoner of war?" asks Newton, after a pause, "and must be sent on with the others!"

"I suppose so," replies Llewellyn. "They talk of sending us on to Saarbruck to-day, and after that I don't know where we shall go."

"But couldn't we put the pressure on somehow, sir, and get you exchanged, so that you might return to your friends?"

"Thanks, Newton, I don't care to have the pressure put on. As far as I can see I am better away from my friends just now, and besides this, I have a very strong motive to keep me here. I am totally ignorant of what has become of Elliott—my friend Elliott, you know, who was so good to me in my illness—and I am more likely to hear of him here than anywhere else. I have no wish either to shirk what all these brave men are compelled to endure. Not that there is such a very great deal to put up with," he added,

“as far as we ourselves are concerned. The captain of our guard is a very good fellow, and grants many indulgences. The worst part of all is the sight of so much misery one cannot alleviate.”

“But you must miss your old comforts and luxuries so much, Mr. March,” begins Newton.

“No, not in the way you imagine. I am beginning to think I was a little too much pampered and petted in the old times, and that the school of luxury in which I was brought up was not the best possible school to develop a man’s energies and muscles, mental or physical. However, there isn’t much chance of my early schooling being repeated in these days, so perhaps there is a possibility of reformation or regeneration for me.”

There is a tramping of feet and a sound of

movement and preparation going on within the farm-house. A Sister of Charity comes out and hands Llewellyn his uniform great coat, in which she has been carefully mending the bullet-holes, and tells him there are some warm woollen wraps being distributed within.

Llewellyn holds out his hand to Newton, "It is time for me to say good-bye I see; you think nothing can be done, Newton, to put things on a better footing?"

"Nothing, as far as I can see, Mr. March; we can only hope for the best. You will write from time to time—will you not?" he adds, anxiously.

"Aye," replies Llewellyn, "I shall take good care that none of my friends suffer again this needless anxiety on my account." He reached the threshold of the farm-house, then turned and went back to Newton.

“Could you not even take a last good-bye for me to Miss Colet, Newton?” he asked.

“Better not, Mr. March, better not,” replies Newton. “That is,” he adds, looking at him earnestly, “if things must be as they are.”

“Yes,” said Llewellyn, sorrowfully but decisively, “things must be as they are,” and he went back to the house.

If only he had not been bound in honour to his friend—if only Max Trego had fixed his hopes elsewhere! If only Victoria had left him a little love (in its highest sense), and trust to bestow upon another woman, how gladly would he have given a different answer; was there any way out of the difficulty, any way to lessen the bitterness of the draught he was compelled to hold out to Anna to drink—he who had so lately him-

self drained the cup to its very dregs—he who would so gladly have laid down his life to have shielded her from an hour's pain and misery! Her drooping head, and white tearful face came before him once more, and anon her flushed scornful glance, as she accused him of being “true to his false-hearted love!” “If only I could feel the accusation were untrue! If only I could feel that the ghost of that love were laid and trampled under foot,” he thought “there would be some chance of redeeming my life from its utter barrenness and nothingness!” Then visions of Victoria succeed thoughts of Anna; the small queenly head, the dainty feet and hands, her royal dignity and repose of manner pass before his mind in vivid reality, and a great thirst and longing comes upon him to look upon her face once more, who not so

very long since was the life and soul of his being. He has not dared to mention her name to Newton—how could he with that scene of yesterday before his eyes?—he knows that, in all probability the first news he hears of her will be that she is married to some other man, yet he is positively certain that, if she walked into that long low room where he sat that very minute, no power in heaven or earth could keep him from clasping her in his arms, and holding her there against all the world.

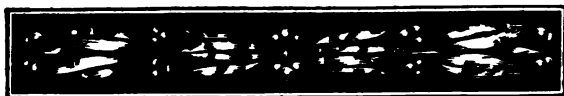
A great bitter cry rises up in his heart, not against her little hand which dealt him this blow, but against the weakness of his own right arm, which let her thus slip away from him.

“I should have held her fast and close,” he

cried, "fast and close, that no earthly power could have plucked her out of my arms!"

Among the sad hearts that marched forth that day from the farm-house hospital to the "Vorwarts! Vorwarts!" of the captain of the guard, perhaps there were none sadder than that of Llewellyn March.





CHAPTER XI.

THE old elm trees in Cheyne Walk had shaken down their last shower of dead leaves on to the narrow, dusty path beneath. The winter mists had settled thick and heavy on the broad, winding river, the Virginia creeper hung dry and withered from the balcony of the old river-side house, and waved to and fro in the warm, crimson lamp-light which streamed through the thick curtains of the lower windows on to the square patch of front garden, with its old-fashioned frutex, and laurels and box.

Within, the room looked bright and cosy, with a great fire blazing on the hearth, lighting up the pictures of the quaint Dutch tiles, and the faded sea-green of the walls, with its stiff, old-fashioned paintings of George III. ladies and gentlemen.

Scarcely the shadow of a change had passed over the room since little round-eyed Anna first began to play hide-and-seek behind the backs of the tall, horse-hair chairs, or scrambled into the old-fashioned window seat to try and count the ripe, yellow pears hanging low on the big tree in the back garden. "Four, five, six, eleven, eight," the little fairy would count on her tiny fingers, and then, creeping to big Max's side, would whisper, "There was one great juicy pear quite low, calling out, 'come pick me, come pick me this morning,' and if Max would only

lift her up just ever so little from the ground, she was sure she could bring it down."

And good-tempered Max would lay aside his books, and, gathering the little creature up in his great arms, would carry her into the garden to gather pears and apples and English figs, that never would ripen, to her heart's content.

And once in the garden, what fun they would have!

That narrow strip of ground had, some two hundred and fifty years ago, formed part of the Bishop of Winchester's flower garden, where Queen Elizabeth had, at one time, coquetted with the young Earl Courtenay, and, perhaps, "done to death" other hearts as young and gay as his.

There was an ancient cedar at the end of the garden, hiding the high brick wall, and

throwing wonderful shadows in the summer's afternoon, which might have told strange tales of the past had a voice been given to it.

On a patch of brown, worn grass, under its big sheltering boughs, was Anna's reveling-ground, study, play-room and theatre for all sorts of exhibitions. "Now I am Queen Elizabeth," would the child exclaim, twisting and folding two huge dock-leaves to imitate a ruff. "Now I am Meg Merrilees," and the little fairy would spring upon the stump of an old tree, pulling her black hair low over her brows, and tossing her arms high in the air. •

"Max, dear, do I look like Meg Merrilees?" she would enquire, and good patient Max, standing a few yards off to be the "audience," would feel bound to confess that she "looked Meg Merrilees herself," and the exhibition

would go on until the little actress, fairly wearied out with her own performances, would drop asleep in the scent and shadow of the cedar and box. Then Max would once more gather her up and carry her into the house, and, depositing her on the large, square sofa with its worn covering, leave her to sleep out the remainder of the summer afternoon.

But these far-away garden pictures are shut out now by the heavy winter curtains, and lie hidden somewhere in the darkness of the winter's night. Anna, the little fairy actress, has wandered away across life's plains to fulfil her destiny. Dr. Trego, hard-worked, over-worked, grave, reserved, and with a world of care on his shoulders, has succeeded to the good-natured, patient lad

who so unweariedly fulfilled the whims and wishes of his little tyrant.

There are some houses which speak only of the upholsterer's shop and the house-decorator's hands, there are others which tell tales of their owners' wealth and luxury, and the high school of art in which they have been reared; and, again, there are others which speak only of "the days that are no more," and while they have any voice at all keep on saying over and over again the same things.

So it was with this old house by the river. No doubt, to Mrs. Trego, the old furniture, and portraits and faded hangings had tales to tell of her early days with her husband by her side and young children about her knee, of her own father and mother, perhaps, for some of this household garniture were relics

of a previous generation. But with Max it was otherwise ; every nook and corner spoke of Anna and Anna only. Out of every shadow looked forth her little face and figure. Her tiny feet went pattering up and down the stairs still, and loud above the everyday sounds that went on rose the tones of her sweet, clear voice.

And Max was well content that thus it should be.

Sitting as they were to-night, in the glow of the lamp and firelight, the mother at her usual knitting and sewing, and Max with his immense "case-book" spread before him, one thought, and one thought only is in their hearts, "Little Anna, where is she ; when will she come back ?"

Scarcely two words had been spoken since their dinner had been removed from table.

Max looks very sombre. He has a case in hand just now which has given him many a sleepless night. A poor fellow, who ought to have been dead over and over again, has somehow managed to pull through, and Max is beginning to think there is a chance for him now, if only he can keep his strength up through another day and night of fever and pain.

The silence has lasted so long it is almost oppressive; the click, click of the steel knitting pins goes steadily on, and ever and anon the east wind flaps the dead tendrils of the creeping plant against the window pane.

Max looks up at last.

“I am such a poor companion for you, mother. I have so much on my mind just now, I fear I am growing more and more bearish every day!”

Mrs. Trego suspends her knitting a moment.

"Not in my eyes, Max dear," she says lovingly, "you have had much to go through of late."

Max replies hastily—

"I am not thinking of that now, mother, I was alluding to poor Davenant, and wondering whether I should get him round or not."

Again there is a silence, and the click, click of the knitting pins goes on.

Max begins again in his straightforward way.

"Get that notion out of your head now, mother. Believe me, it has all come to an end, and I am very well content that it should. It was a very pleasant dream while it lasted, but it was only a dream, and I don't intend to give way to any more such fancies."

Mrs. Trego shakes her head, and her eyes get very dim for a moment. She dearly loves her brave, honest Max, and has, at the same time, a very tender place in her heart for dear little Anna.

“Don’t be afraid for me mother,” Max goes on, as he sees the knitting trembling in her hand, and a great tear gather and fall on her work, “I shall allow no woman living to ruin my life for me, nor even alter its course. Dear little Anna I shall always look upon as one of the sweetest, truest women God ever made, but for all that, I shall not allow her to crush my spirit, nor trample my energies under foot. I have other aims before me now, and, well—if they do not serve to fill up my life quite, they will, I hope, at least make it a useful and pleasant one.”

“God bless you Max,” says the mother,

looking at her son with pride. "I think you are one in ten thousand. I don't believe she will ever find one more worthy of her than you would have been."

"I am not so sure," laughs Max. "Looking at the whole affair as calmly as I do now, I can see she would find Llewellyn March a far more suitable companion than ever I should have been, with my unimaginative temperament and dull prosaic ways."

"It is curious," he went on, "how strangely those two, brought up under such totally different circumstances, have developed the same tastes and ideas. I, in my mad, selfish jealousy, I suppose, had some inkling of this, and endeavoured to keep them apart. Llewellyn, conscious, I imagine, of the strong under-current of sympathy between himself and little Anna, turns it into a theory, and

works out some wild notions of his brother's soul coming back to him in Anna's body. While Anna, not attempting to reason on the matter, and feeling only the attraction of one to the other, falls deeply in love with him, throws every other consideration overboard, and, woman-like, gives up herself and all she has into his hands."

"Ah, Max! all that may be true," sighs the mother, "but he will not make her a better husband than you would, nor love her half so well."

Max laughs again.

"We don't know yet, mother, that he will make her any husband at all. We are completely in the dark as to how this matter will end. Only one thing I am sure of, that no foolish fancies of mine shall ever distress or worry the poor little thing again. Now that it

is all over, I can see plainly how utterly unsuited she would have been for the life I held out to her, and how, body, soul and spirit, she is Sir Geoffrey Colet's daughter, and Llewellyn March's cousin."

"Yet," says the mother, thoughtfully, "how utterly unlike Mr. March in many points, and how wonderful so young a girl, with the old-fashioned, methodical training she has had in this house, should develop such decision of character, such energy and—self-will shall I say, Max?"

"Yes, call it self-will, if you like. But you forget the sort of woman her mother was, 'half is mine, and half is thine,'" he says, with the nearest approach to a quotation of which he is capable, for Max is not a great hand at poetry. "Don't you see, she gets her refinement, her tastes and part of her

beauty from the Colet's, and her energy, fire and—yes—self-will from her mother, with her black eyes and beautiful hair. Poor creature!" he adds pityingly, and his thoughts go back to the miserable death-bed in the workhouse infirmary. "Thank God, dear little Anna has been reserved for a better fate and fortune than hers."

Is Anna travelling along in the cold, dark night, with drooping wings and weary eyes, so sure of the fate and fortune that stretches out before her?

Max opens his case-book again, the mother returns to her knitting, and little Anna, shrinking back into a dark corner of the carriage, under the heap of rugs and furs which Newton has piled upon her, lays her weary head on the old man's shoulder, and wonders in a faint, tired voice, "If the

journey will ever end? Shall I ever see those two dear faces again?"

The mother looks up from her knitting once more.

"God bless little Anna," she says, "wherever she is, and let us some day see her sweet face again."

"Aye," says Max, again breaking off from poor Davenant, and his fever and pain, "I dare say her life will drift far away from ours now, but she will always know where to come should she want help or sympathy."

As he spoke, wheels stopped at the garden gate, and the opening and shutting of a carriage door is heard, there is a shuffling and movement of feet along the narrow hall, and a short sharp bark from the house dog.

"What is it," asks Max, going to the dining-room door to ascertain the cause of

this unusual interruption to the evening monotony of their household.

“What is it?” The door opens, a drooping little figure comes quietly into the room, and taking both his hands in hers looks up in his face with pale cheeks and heavy eyes—

Little Anna has come home again!





CHAPTER XII.

LUNCHEON was never at any time a very cheerful meal at Sir Charles Oldfield's table. A special corner was always reserved for the baronet, sheltered by screens from the draught of windows and doors. This special corner was generally supplied with some sort of "farinaceous food," and some wonderful *ragout*, the details of whose composition took Victoria a full hour to master, before she felt competent to transmit instructions to the *chef* in person. A close consultation with this important

personage once a day, relative to Sir Charles's dietary being one of the duties which fell to her lot.

Miriam was invariably late at this meal, or at times not forthcoming, for since the advent of Victoria among them, she had allowed herself a little more latitude in her charitable pursuits.

"I have had a most dispiriting morning!" she had said, coming in thus late one day and laying her bonnet on the chair by her side, and her umbrella upon the table. Victoria looked long and earnestly at the umbrella; Miriam catching her glance, placed it a little further on the table, turning the point towards Victoria, with a look which said plainly—"I am quite prepared to vindicate the rights of my umbrella as well as my own."

"A most dispiriting morning," continued

Miriam, possibly intending her remark as much for the benefit of George, who stood at her elbow, as for Victoria.

Sir Charles slowly feeding himself with his "farinaceous food," rarely showed any disposition to enter into conversation till the close of the meal.

Victoria with icy politeness, regretted that the morning should have passed so unsatisfactorily. Miriam paid no attention to her remark, and turned to the butler—

"George, I want some jelly and some wine packed in a basket, and sent to that girl Freestone—you know where you went on Sunday for me—and stay, another tract this time, 'Will you listen,' it is on my davenport in my sitting-room. Mind you give her that into her hands, and tell her it will do her far more good than the wine or jelly!"

“Jelly,” says Sir Charles, “Ah, if I could take jelly of some sort, I might pull round a little. Watherston was telling me the other day if I had no real appetite for my meals I could keep myself up with spoonfuls of calves’ foot at stated intervals.”

“Will you try some?” asks Victoria, anxious to turn the subject from the unfortunate Freestone girl, and to save herself from the tirade upon unfortunates in general which she feels sure will ensue.

Miriam sees through the device, and determines not to be deterred from speaking—

“What I have done for that girl no one knows. If it had not been for me, she would not have been here at all. Only last Sunday I sent her a slip of paper with a shilling inside, and a few words that a ‘penitent desired to return most humble and hearty thanks for

restoration to health.' To-day I go to her and what does she do? Gives me back the shilling, and tells me she didn't return thanks, because she wasn't thankful for her life, and wished she had died in her misery!"

Victoria's attention is arrested now, somehow she feels a strong sympathy for this "Freestone girl," who wasn't thankful to have her life given back to her. She gives Miriam an unusual amount of attention, and the latter is almost willing to feel flattered by Victoria's show of interest in her story.

"But the worst is to come!" she goes on. "I had told her expressly to go to the temporary church in Taylor's Court, where I knew she would hear the Gospel preached, instead of that, she goes to the temporary church in Taylor's Lane, a very nest of Romanism, an idolatrous, Ritualistic, and

Popish" (here Miriam paused for breath and another adjective, but not finding one went on) "place of worship! She not only goes there, but stays throughout the service!" Miriam is positively scarlet in the face now. She has been feeding herself rapidly with small mouthfuls while she has been talking, and looks up at Victoria to see what effect her eloquence is producing.

"Indeed," is Victoria's expressive remark, and her face expresses indeed! and nothing more.

"But there is worse to come," says Miriam, pushing back her plate, and signing to the butler for some sherry and water, "there is worse to come! I asked her why, as a member of an Evangelical Church, she did not rise instantly and enter her protest against the mummery and nonsense of these Papists

in disguise, by quitting the building there and then, and her answer was this, 'I stayed on because I liked it, there are flowers on the altar (altar, too, not Communion table!) and in the other church there are none, and flowers like those always remind me of my own early home, and the squire's house near where we lived!'

Miriam has finished eating and talking at the same moment; to be more than ten minutes over a meal taken in the middle of a day's work she would esteem a sinful waste of her precious time. She has gone to a side mirror in a dark corner of the room, and is adjusting her green and violet bonnet, and smoothing her hair with a pocket-comb.

Victoria takes in a side view of her badly dressed figure, and ill-arranged hair—

"And her mother was a Devereux!" she

thinks, "and *her* mother, a Brandon ! whence then this cross in the Oldfield race !" Then another thought succeeds, "at least she has more heart left in her than you have Victoria, at least she is in earnest about something, and strives to perform her duty, and you—you care little whether the world goes round, or the world stands still, it is all painted in grey, and brown, and smoke-tints for you now," and a feeling very much akin to envy for the plain awkward badly-dressed spinster, thrills through the heart of the listless young beauty, as she watches her step-daughter button up her Ulster and prepare to set forth upon another errand of charity.

"Miriam," she said, making a grand effort, "will you give me that girl's address? I think I should like to call and see her."

What if she, too, might find some distrac-

tion in Miriam's occupations, might learn in the sorrows of others to forget herself and her own misery ! Besides, there is something in Miriam's description of this girl which has singularly attracted her, and she thinks it would be some relief to talk with a girl who has an honest tongue, and a love for flowers in her heart, some break in the miserable monotony of her afternoon's drive through the dreary, desolate park, or along the misty West End streets.

Miriam stands transfixed, tracts in one hand, and umbrella in another.

"You !" she exclaims, scarcely crediting her ears. "You !" she repeats. "I thought you considered visiting among the sick poor something quite beneath you, quite out of your line, in fact !"

"I don't think I ever said so," replied

Victoria, quietly. "Indeed, I imagine it is rather beyond my capabilities than beneath them ! "

Sir Charles looks up irritably.

"All this jars upon my nerves confoundedly," he says. "Watherston told me only yesterday that an hour's perfect repose after every meal was absolutely necessary for the proper performance of the functions of digestion ! "

It must be confessed that the Baronet's life in these days was far from a pleasant one. Miriam, conceiving herself to be, to a great extent, relieved from the responsibility of her father's health, had handed over her duties *in toto* to Victoria, at the same time reserving to herself perfect right to express her opinion, and loudly, too, as to the way in which these duties were performed.

If in marrying his second wife, Sir Charles had expected to procure for himself a gentle, loving nurse, he must have been grievously disappointed. Victoria's education and previous mode of life had scarcely been conducive to the cultivation of the qualities most necessary in a sick room, or in attendance on an invalid. . She did her best it is true, but her best fell far short of the Baronet's ideal; fell far short, indeed, of Miriam's scanty attendance in the old days, and she was anything but his ideal.

There was also one marked difference between Miriam's care of her father and Victoria's. The former undoubtedly, whatever might be the eccentricities of her mode of life, possessed a certain amount of affection for the Baronet, which the latter entirely lacked. Victoria drove herself to the per-

formance of rigidly marked out duties, ended them with a sigh of relief, and escaped as quickly as possible from them to the solace or torment of her own thoughts and memories. The discipline harsh, daily, unvarying, was, no doubt, good for her and the development of that poor little soul within her struggling into life, but whether it was as good for her husband and his health to have a perfectly passionless abstracted companion and wife by his side, is another thing.

“I think,” he goes on in the same peevish tone, “women are not what they were in my young days. When I married your mother, Miriam, they were gentler and more homely—no—that’s not what I mean, more home-like—no—that’s not it either, but it was five-and-thirty years ago, so it doesn’t much matter.”

Miriam does not like this allusion to her age, and winces manifestly. Victoria flushes nervously; this is not the first time Sir Charles has alluded to his former marriage. Miriam walks with long steps towards the door.

“If you wish for Freestone’s address,” she says, “George can give it to you. I should not like to stand in the way of your doing a deed of usefulness.” She closes the door behind her, opens it again half way, and looks across to Victoria. “If,” she says, nodding her head, “you really intend paying this visit, I should advise you to walk. Driving, you would attract too much attention in that locality, and if you really wish to do even a small amount of good, it must be done without ostentation. *I walk invariably.*”

Then she goes.

Victoria makes no reply. Miriam knows she could not have suggested to her anything more distasteful than a walk through London streets; that under any circumstances it was a feat she would not dream of accomplishing, even with a far more attractive object in view than that of a visit to a sick woman.

Victoria at once lays aside her project, and takes up her embroidery, finds it ugly, uninteresting, wearisome, lays down her embroidery, and takes up her project again. Sir Charles is sinking into a comfortable doze in his easy chair, with his feet on an eider down pillow, and another supporting his head. A wintry sun is lighting up the bare trees and dusty evergreens in the square opposite the windows, and Victoria, with a sigh, thinks of the wonderful lights and shades that same

sun is casting upon the Pentallack hills with their crests of pine and juniper.

It is too much! She will not sit still, and let those dangerous longings and dreams creep over her. She rings the bell, orders her carriage, and in another twenty minutes is half way on the road to "that girl Free-stone's" house.

Down one narrow turning, up another muddy street, Victoria's bays go prancing along, footman and coachman meantime indulging in wondering comments on this unprecedented freak of their new mistress. At length they are brought to a standstill at a small paved court (somewhere in a region between Pimlico and Chelsea), and Victoria, alighting, looks vaguely at the dirty children and gossiping women who rapidly assemble to gaze at the fashionably dressed lady.

The footman gives a thundering knock at a small door of a very small house (to Victoria it looks more like a dog-kennel than a human habitation). A small boy, with a huge head of hair, opens the door, and stands transfixed at the sight of a lady all in velvets and furs, with a footman, a coachman, and carriage and horses in the background.

“Elizabeth Freestone, I said,” repeats Victoria. “Am I to go up those stairs?”

She looks at the little crooked steps, carpetless, narrow, and with broken balusters, and wonders how human beings can mount such contrivances in safety. The boy relieves her mind by opening a side door silently, for the power of speech has not returned to him, and Victoria finds herself in a room so close and stifling, that for the moment she feels sick and faint. A young woman comes forward

to meet her, very poorly, if somewhat smartly clad, with her hand to her side, and a deep, hoarse cough.

“Did you wish to see me, madam?” she asks. “My room is not fit for you to sit down in, but if you would take a chair,” and she places a rush-bottomed chair, with a broken back, by Victoria’s side.

“Are you Elizabeth Freestone?” asks Victoria, gathering her velvets together, and sitting down as best she could. “Miss Oldfield told me you were ill, and liked flowers, so I have brought you a few.”

As she spoke she handed the girl a bunch of stephanotis and scarlet camellias she had purchased at a florist’s on her road thither.

The girl takes them wonderingly.

“Miss Oldfield told you that, madam! I

thought from what she said this morning she didn't approve of flowers."

"That or something like it," said Victoria, becoming embarrassed. "I have forgotten exactly what she said ; but you will like them, will you not ?"

"Like them !—oh, ma'am !" And the girl carefully picks up some of the scarlet petals which have fallen on the floor, and places them within the leaves of an old book, on the rickety table.

"I have brought you, also some jelly and wine from Miss Oldfield," Victoria goes on, glancing at a small basket which the footman had deposited on the floor. "But it seems to me an impossibility for you or any one else to get well in such a small close room as this."

"Oh, I am not ill now, ma'am," the girl replied. "I was very ill some two

months ago, when Miss Oldfield gave me that letter for the Dispensary ; but they discharged me as cured last week."

"Discharged you as cured !" repeats Victoria. "I wonder when they consider people ill, then ! Not until they are almost dying, I suppose ! "

Freestone shakes her head.

"I was almost dying a month ago, ma'am. And if I had died I shouldn't have cared much, nor anybody else either."

She walks impatiently to the miserable little fire-place, with its scanty supply of coals, and pushes away with her foot a little thin black kitten curled on the ragged mat in front. Then she comes back to Victoria.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, for speaking in that way ; but trouble has made me bitter and hasty."

“Yes,” said Victoria, speaking more to herself than the girl. “It freezes and hardens some, and it heats and hardens others. But the result is much the same in either case.”

Freestone is simply astonished; she had fully expected from Victoria a sermon similar in force to the one she had had from Miriam in the morning.

She eyes the beautiful lady keenly. Ah! then sorrow must find its way into hearts through satins and velvets as well as through cottons and rags!

“Cannot you get out of this close, dirty neighbourhood,” Victoria reiterates. “I feel sure, in the fresh country air you would lose your cough and pain in the side.”

“My cough is nothing now, ma’am, and the pain in my side only comes with bending over the machine. Besides,” she added, in a

lower voice, "I left my home in the country to get a better living here, and how could I go back a pauper and disgraced?"

Victoria doesn't know what to say. She has heard this girl's story—an often-told tale: a young seamstress, leaving her home and friends in the country to find better employment in London, finding it as a machinist to a large tailor and contractor, stitching waistcoats for three halfpence each, starving on this munificent remuneration, tempted one dark night, ruined, forsaken, and now trembling on the verge of crime or suicide.

She cannot bring herself to admit that in all the world there can be one more utterly miserable than herself; but here, at least is one equally forlorn.

"I wish," said Victoria, at length, looking pitifully at the girl, "you would come to my

house and talk to me sometimes ; I think it might do you good to leave off your work and get some fresh air now and then : and perhaps, too," she added, in so low a voice the girl could scarcely catch what she said, "it might lessen your burden to see that some others have as heavy a load to bear as yourself."

"I go to you, ma'am !" Freestone exclaims, with wide-opened eyes, "You can't know about me—you haven't heard—"

"Yes, I do know—yes, I have heard," interrupts Victoria. Then, to change the subject, she enquires—

"Tell me, what did they say to you at the Dispensary about your cough ; did they think it was from the lungs ?"

"One of the gentlemen did ma'am, but Dr. Trego said it was no such thing, that if I

had proper nourishment and plenty of fresh air it would go in a week."

"Dr. Trego!" repeats Victoria, and her face flushes, and her heart beats rapidly at the rush of memories that name conjures up.

"Yes, Dr. Trego, ma'am. Do you know him? Such a kind gentleman to those who are really ill, but very cross sometimes to the women when they bring dirty children, or babies with crooked legs."

"Dr. Trego!" Victoria can but repeat, wonderingly. Was this, could this really be a chance of obtaining the tidings she was thirsting and longing for?

"Yes, I have heard he was kind, from some people who knew him," she remarks.

And an impromptu little scheme flashes through her brain.

"Did you ever see any of his family?"

“Oh, yes, ma’am,” Freestone replied. “When I was ill once before in the summer, with an abscess in my hand, he told me to come up to his house every other day for soup. Mrs. Trego used to see me sometimes, and sometimes his sister. Ah, she was a sweet young lady; but she went away abroad somewhere as nurse to the sick and wounded soldiers in the war, and they say she has never been the same since she came back.”

Victoria passes her hand over her forehead, trying to collect her thoughts.

“Went—came back—has never been the same since,” she repeats to herself. “Ah, then she had the boldness to go after Llewellyn March after all, and has never been the same since she returned. Great heavens! What news has she brought back with her?”

She starts to her feet.

"Your room is almost too close and hot for me," she says to the girl. "But I will come again and see you very soon."

She pauses to finish the arrangement of the small scheme which has just now entered her brain.

"Tell me," she enquires of the girl, "don't you think if Dr. Trego were to come and see you here in your own room he might do you some good?"

"He might, ma'am," the woman replies, doubtfully. "But don't trouble about it."

"It will be no trouble," Victoria remarks, pleasantly. "I will call on him as I go home, and ask him to do so!"

She escapes thankfully into the fresh air, and insists on closing the door for herself to save the poor girl from the biting east wind. Then she beckons to her footman, and de-

sires to be driven to the Pimlico Dispensary. "There is a doctor attending there," she says, "whom this poor woman fancies may do her good. His name is Trego. He will not be at the Dispensary at this time of day ; but they will give you his address."

She knows that John the footman will tell Francis the coachman, and Francis the coachman tell George the butler, and George convey the news in turn to Miriam in one of their confidential and spiritual conversations. At least, with her little scheme, or attempt at one, she has fenced herself in with some sort of outworks behind which she can manœuvre at will.

Then, as her carriage whirls her along the road to Dr. Trego's she begins to wonder how she shall dare face Anna again. How and in what way Anna will receive her (for it

does not for one moment occur to her that Anna might by any possibility refuse to receive her, Lady Victoria Oldfield), and, above all, and beyond all, what tidings will she bring of Llewellyn March !

It was not without some trepidation that she thought of her coming interview with Anna. Her recollection of their last encounter was vivid in the extreme, and the ringing scorn of Anna's voice was in her ears still. What if she should turn round upon her in the same way once more, and instead of giving her the news for which she would beg, bid her go home to the man she had married, and be true to him. What could she say in reply ? How defend herself from the double taunt ?

"I will go down on my very knees to her," Victoria thought, "she may trample me

under foot and triumph over me as much as she pleases, so long as she tells me what has become of him I shall not care."

And then she tried to steel her heart to bear the news she felt sure would come. One of two things she knew it would be; either he was coming home to be married to this girl who was so careless of what the world said of her, that she had absolutely gone in pursuit of him, followed him from one country to the other with a bribe in her hands; or else he was dead and buried perhaps, fallen in battle, fighting for a country and a cause which had no claims on him, or a victim to typhoid or one of those horrible diseases, which she had been told followed in the track of the "glorious victories."

After all, what difference could it make to her—ought it to make to her—which ever way

it ended? Ended! Had it not all ended long ago, on that miserable morning, when she stood in the chancel of St. George's church, and had had a blessing poured upon her head by the priest in office. Ended! And she pressed her fingers on her eyeballs and tried to drive the thought out of her brain, that after all it would never end, that all through her whole life, be it long, or be it short, her love for Llewellyn March would be her curse and her torment, just as once it had been her glory and her joy.





CHAPTER XIII.

ANNA'S welcome to her old home had been warm in the extreme, although perhaps a somewhat silent one. Mrs. Trego had at first wept profusely over her with many exclamations, so many indeed that Max had felt compelled to interfere—

“Let her alone mother,” he had said, “don’t tease her with questions. Don’t you see that she is thoroughly worn out?”

And thoroughly worn out she was. The strain upon her mind and body during the last few eventful weeks had been immense,

and when once the necessity for action and self-control had been removed, she ran down so rapidly, that Max began to fear she might never rally again.

“Not that I think she will die mother,” he had said in answer to Mrs. Trego’s enquiries, “her constitution is too young and vigorous for that, but I sometimes fear she will never recover her old spirits and energies. However, we can only let her alone, and hope for the best.”

And Anna, thus “let alone,” what did she do? For the first ten days or so after her return, she lay still and quiet on her own little bed, burying her face in the downy pillows, as though to shut out every sight and sound. To Max’s enquiry—

“If she were ill or in pain,” she merely said—

“ Oh, no, only so tired.”

Mrs. Trego suggested “ that she might feel better dressed and lying on a couch, and Anna at once assented, but for all that, remained still with her face hidden in the pillows, until Max begged, as a special favour, that she would, for all their sakes, rouse herself, and do her best to resume her old pleasures and pursuits.

So Anna, with a great sigh of weariness, shook off her lethargy, and endeavoured once more to take part in the life about her; and then it was that they could see how terribly sad was the change wrought in her.

It was not only that she had altered physically, was thinner, paler, with larger eyes, and sadder mouth, than in the old days; a more subtle change than that had passed over her, a change which Max and his mother

felt rather than saw ; a change from brightest girlhood to a sombre womanhood ; from the first sweet rosy morning light—not to the glory of noonday splendour—but to the grey dull twilight of a winter's day. Anna Colet, compared with the Anna Trego of old, was as an outline crayon sketch by the side of the magic painting fresh from the artist's hands, all colour, light, and brilliancy faded from the picture ; as some wondrous sunset scene among mountains, all ablaze with gold, and purple, and crimson ; an instant only, the sun sinks below the horizon, the landscape remains, rock and valley, tree and stream, still are there, the same, but not the same, for the gold is changed to brown, the purple to grey, and the crimson has vanished !

She was so very quiet now, with such a white puzzled look always on her face, as

though she were thinking and wondering over some strange dream she had had, and in which she herself had played a part ; as though she were trying to read some foreign language of which she knew, but the alphabet, trying to understand some wonderful things in heaven and earth, which were far beyond her philosophy !

Poor little Anna ! Like some early fledgling, whom the spring sunshine had tempted forth to see the great green earth, she had returned frost-bitten, with crumpled feathers and drooping wings, to the warm narrow nest.

Once Max asked her if she would not recommence her old favourite morning walks—

“ Not just yet, Max,” she replied, “ I am too tired,” and Max yielded the point, and was weak enough to order a carriage to call

for her daily, for an afternoon drive through the parks.

This was all the exercise and diversion they could induce her to take ; everything that required the slightest exertion of mind or body, she quietly and persistently put away from her, always in the same pleading voice, and with the same weary cry—

“ I am so tired ! ”

Max had received from Newton the fullest account, even to the smallest details, of all that had occurred during their absence from England. At first he scarcely knew whether to praise or blame Llewellyn March for the way in which he had deported himself towards Anna. He quickly, however, made up his mind—

“ I think,” he said angrily, “ you have both of you put too much meaning into Anna’s

words, put altogether a wrong construction upon them; she is very young, she did not intend to convey the meaning you infer, and March might have known that."

Newton shook his head, the scene between Llewellyn and Anna had to his mind been so terribly real and tragic, that it seemed hard to have it treated in this way, as though the actors in it had only been half in earnest all the time.

"She is feeling something very keenly, Dr. Trego, that is evident," he said, "something has knocked her over, any one can see."

"She is suffering from a shock to her nervous system," Max replied loftily, "brought on by over-fatigue, and going among sights and scenes where no woman has any business to go. She will soon get over it, I haven't a doubt, and take her own place in

society as Sir Geoffrey Colet's daughter. And," added Max, rising from his chair to end the discussion, "I will not have the subject alluded to in this way again, in my presence, at any rate."

In saying this, Max was not quite so honest as it was his wont to be. In his heart of hearts he was perpetually saying to himself, "March is a confounded idiot. If he had chosen, he might have had the sweetest girl in all England for his wife. By the time he has had a little common-sense knocked into his head, and a few of his high-flown notions knocked out, he may find that his chance has gone."

And perhaps Max, in the unpleasantly complicated state of his own feelings, would not have felt at all sorry when such was found to be the case.

On the afternoon of the day that Lady Victoria paid her unexpected visit to the poor suffering seamstress, Mrs. Trego and Anna were sitting in the faded blue and stone drawing-room, with its wonderful pieces of worsted-work, its quaint brass fenders and fireirons, and its nick-nacks and trifles of a past generation. The east wind roared and threatened in the wide chimney. The old cedar creaked and groaned in the wintry garden, and the creepers hung limp and leafless about the windows.

Anna is reclining in a large, square arm-chair, brought up expressly for her comfort from the lower rooms, her harp stands covered in the corner, and over her closed piano the angel Gabriel looks down.

Mrs. Trego, in her warmth of sympathy and tenderness for Anna's feelings, had

wished to have the picture removed, but Max had objected.

“You can’t make her forget the past, mother. At every turn something will start up to bring these things back to her. It is better for her to face her troubles than to flee from them, and in time, I hope, she will live them down.”

So the angel Gabriel hung there as heretofore, and smiled out of the faded canvas towards Anna, with her sore heart and weary spirit, leaning back in the arm-chair.

“Would you not like a book, love?” Mrs. Trego had asked her, and Anna, assenting, had gone listlessly to the book-shelves in the recess, and had taken up the first volume that came to hand. It happened to be a volume of “Alison’s History of Europe,” and Mrs. Trego, glancing up from her work, saw that

it mattered very little what the book was, for the girl's head leaned heavily on her hand, and the pages lay unturned before her.

Max opened the door softly and came in.

"Anna, dear," he says, "there is a lady downstairs who has called to see you. Do you feel equal to receiving strangers just now? Shall I tell her some other time?"

Anna does not lift her eyes from "Alison's Europe."

"If you like, Max," she replies, "just as you please." She does not even ask who this visitor is.

"It is Lady Victoria Oldfield!" Max goes on, "she seems very anxious to see you."

"Lady Victoria Oldfield," Anna repeats slowly, now lifting her eyes from her volume. Then she pauses a moment, evidently to bring back her thoughts from that far-away

land where they were wandering. "Yes, I will see her, Max, and quite alone, please," she adds, closing her book, and laying it on the floor by her side.





CHAPTER XIV.

AS Lady Victoria Oldfield entered, Mrs. Trego, with a slight bow, left the room, and Victoria found herself face to face with Anna.

“How changed, how sadly changed,” she thinks, looking down on the thin, white face and little figure shrinking in the depths of the large arm-chair. “She must have been very ill. How foolish of me to be so nervous about this meeting. She doesn’t look so very terrible after all !”

She advances towards Anna with her usual slow, graceful walk, and in her soft, low voice,

with one of her sweetest half-smiles, apologizes and questions in one breath.

“It is so good of you to receive me, Miss Colet; I hope I am not intruding. Are you really better to-day?” extending her hand as she speaks.

Anna takes no notice of the question nor of the proffered hand; she will not pretend to the faintest semblance of the faintest friendship for this girl, whom she so thoroughly despises. She does not even raise her head from her pillow, and scarcely lifts her large, heavy eyelids, with their long, dark fringes.

“You wished to see me, Lady Victoria?” she inquires, languidly, indifferently.

Victoria is embarrassed. She replaces her hand in her tiny seal muff, and freezes rapidly.

"I fear I am intruding," she says, somewhat nervously.

Anna pays no attention to her remark.

"You have come to me for news of Mr. March?" she asks, in her usual simple, straightforward manner, as if it were quite an everyday occurrence that a married woman should come to her for news of her old lover.

Victoria becomes yet more embarrassed. Over and over again she had, during her drive to Dr. Trego's, been wondering in her own mind how she should approach this subject without seeming to approach it, and gain her end without in any way betraying herself to Anna. But she had not expected to be met in this simple, straightforward way, and to find that, instead of standing there to question Anna at her will, the situation is reversed, and she is herself the one interrogated.

"May I sit down?" she says, looking at the chair by her side, in reality to give herself time.

"I beg your pardon," replies Anna, "pray be seated." And now she waits for Victoria to speak.

Victoria quickly recovers herself, and determines to play her part as questioner.

"Did you really go to Metz, Miss Colet? really join the Red Cross Society?" she asks, with her sweet, half-smile once more.

Anna lifts her heavy lids and looks her full in the face.

"Do you wish to hear about me, Lady Victoria, or about my cousin, Mr. March?"

Yes, her cousin! However much he may have belonged to Lady Victoria at one time, she has at least this share in him now, which the other has not.

Victoria shrinks visibly, rallies, however, and fences again.

“Did you see him, Miss Colet? Did you meet with him anywhere?” she asks.

“Yes, I did, Lady Victoria,” Anna replies. “I saw him, spoke with him, and left him with but one impression on my mind.”

“What was that?” asks Victoria, startled and surprised for the moment into straightforward earnestness.

“That he loved you once as truly as ever a man loved a woman, and that he will go on so loving you to the end of his life!”

Victoria is hit now, and there is no hiding it. Anna aimed to wound certainly, but did not dream that her words would have gone so deeply home.

With white cheeks and trembling lips, Victoria totters across the room to Anna's

chair, and kneeling by her side, looks up in her face piteously.

"Don't tell me that," she implores. "Don't heap upon me any more misery than I have to bear already. My God!" she exclaims, passionately, "don't you see how I suffer?"

Anna is touched. Now that she sees this proud lady, hedged in with conventionality and the small etiquettes of life, showing some real feeling, she will have more mercy on her.

"I did not know," she replied, "you would feel it in that way, or I would have hidden my thoughts from you."

"No!" exclaims Victoria, in the same low, passionate tone, and still kneeling by her side. "You think me utterly heartless and worldly, no true woman, but such an one as those poor creatures who sell themselves for

gold, and are quite content with the price which they hold in their hands ! ”

Anna bows assent.

“ It is quite true, Lady Victoria, I looked on you in that light, and am glad to find you are not such an one as I thought.”

In the old days Victoria would have thought herself greatly insulted by such plain, unvarnished speaking, and would have resented it keenly and skilfully, if in a perfectly well-bred manner ; but she is brought too low now to venture on any such display of resentment, has too little respect left for herself and her own conduct to attempt any defence of it in the eyes of others.

She almost shivers as Anna’s words go home.

“ Will you be so very kind,” she says, humbly and pleadingly, “ to tell me how you

know that he—that what you said a moment ago is true?”

Anna is touched now, as the memory of her last words with Llewellyn March rises up before her.

“I do not think, Lady Victoria,” she replies, “you have any right to ask me such a question.”

“No,” said Victoria, sadly, rising from her knees. “What right have I to ask you any questions at all?”

She looks so utterly helpless, hopeless, and miserable that Anna holds out her hand to her.

“From the bottom of my heart I pity you!” she exclaims.

Neither of them speaks for a few moments. Then Anna begins—

“Mr. March has been wounded, but is

recovering, and has gone a prisoner of war into Germany."

Victoria is trembling from head to foot. She goes to Anna's side once more, and kneeling down at her very feet, looks up in her face with such an utterly hopeless look of blank misery and despair that Anna shudders, and can think only of some poor agonized soul shivering on the brink of the world it has lost.

"Miss Colet," she asks, "what can I do?"

Anna looks down at her pityingly.

"You asked me this once before," she says, "and I told you. You ask me now—and I do not know."

Max's step is heard on the stairs; Victoria rises from her knees, and lets her veil fall over her face. Max thinks the interview has lasted quite long enough, and will not have

Anna distressed or worried by such an one as Lady Victoria Oldfield, for whom he has not even the faintest amount of liking or respect.

"Anna," he says, "you must lie down and rest a little; you will be quite worn out. Lady Victoria, are you not afraid for your horses in this bitter wind and frost?" Then, as he escorts her downstairs, he apologizes somewhat, "I beg your pardon, Lady Victoria, but Anna has been very ill, and cannot stand even the smallest amount of excitement or worry."

Only as she steps into her carriage does Victoria recollect the poor seamstress and her cough. But it is too late now; she must write a note, and she sinks back into the soft cushions and whispers, out of the depths of the misery in her heart, "All love, youth and blessedness for ever left behind, only the

torment and pain of remorse through the long years to come!"

Mrs. Trego is covering Anna over with warm wraps, and stirring up the fire into a blaze.

"You look cold, love," she is saying. "We shall have a bitter night," and she glances across the river to the masses of low clouds piling up over the red wintry sun, and foretelling a fall of snow.

Max comes in shivering, and looks anxiously at Anna, who is leaning back in her chair, tired out with her long talk.

"We shall soon have brighter weather, Anna," he says, cheerfully, "and then we will get you away to some warm sea-side place."

"Yes," echoes Anna, wearily, "we shall soon have brighter weather." She glances up at the heavy bank of clouds hanging low

across the lurid sunset. "We shall soon have brighter weather," she repeats, "but before that the great white merciful snow will come down, and cover all our ugliness and beauty, our joys and our griefs, with its shroud and pall of death!"

END OF VOL. II.





the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has also become a major employer of women. In 1980, women made up 40% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 50%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of women in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with disabilities. In 1980, people with disabilities made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with disabilities.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from ethnic minorities. In 1980, people from ethnic minorities made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people from ethnic minorities.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with mental health problems. In 1980, people with mental health problems made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with mental health problems.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with physical health problems. In 1980, people with physical health problems made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with physical health problems.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with learning difficulties. In 1980, people with learning difficulties made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with learning difficulties.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with substance abuse problems. In 1980, people with substance abuse problems made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with substance abuse problems.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with chronic health problems. In 1980, people with chronic health problems made up 1% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 3%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing demand for public services, and the increasing awareness of the needs of people with chronic health problems.